

Potent Portables

Phil Jones Bass Suitcase combo and 4B speaker cab

By Ed Friedland

AFTER DECADES of creating some of the world's most innovative home audio and P.A. speaker designs, Phil Jones has turned back to his first passion—bass. "Bass guitar is the instrument from Hell," according to Jones. It's true: The frequency and dynamic demands placed on a bass amp and its speakers are indeed extreme, and the Phil Jones approach to these sonic challenges is clearly reflected in his unique line of bass amps.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Phil Jones combos and cabs employ multiple 5-inch drivers exclusively, and both the Suitcase

and 4B extension cab each feature four of these ferocious little piranhas. Jones says the output of four of these mini-woofers is comparable to a heavy-duty 10-inch woofer—that is, if you could find one with a massively huge 4-inch voice coil. Why 5-inch drivers? The answer is complex (check the company website for a more detailed explanation), but in essence, multiple 5-inch drivers provide a large radiating area, with more control and less distortion than a single larger woofer of similar output potential. It's all about obtaining ample cone surface area while controlling and reducing "excursion," and having the group of

drivers share the total workload and function in unison as a single "piston" over a wider frequency range. Got that? It's simple—there's strength in numbers.

Jones puts a lot of thought into his electronics designs as well—many of the components inside his amps are designed specifically for the PJB line, and most are made in his large manufacturing facility in China.

UPRIGHT-FRIENDLY

Taking a closer look at the controls and features, the Suitcase provides two channels, each with its own 5-band EQ. This is especially useful on doubling gigs, allowing you to dial in a tone that works for each instrument; or to control feedback on the upright without mucking up the tone of your electric bass. When set to passive mode, the input impedance jumps to 4.7 megohms, which preserves your tone when using a piezo pickup without a preamp, and this makes the Suitcase very upright-friendly. Other cool features include an optical compressor/limiter, headphone out, preamp out, balanced line out, effects loop, tuner out, and switchable 120/240 voltage.

The squat little Suitcase may look a little different (it's deeper than it is tall or wide), and it doesn't sound like your typical bass combo, either. There's no tweeter, yet the high end is surprisingly clear and articulate, without sounding harsh. The mid-range is very punchy and full-bodied, with no obvious peaks or valleys.

The low end, while respectably deep, is more notable for its controlled and firm attack. With many amps and cabs, the note's fundamental provides the foundation, while the definition comes more from the mids and highs. With the Suitcase, the articulation extends down through the lows, and there's a unique attack to each note that really cuts through a mix. Dynamic response is quick and punchy, and the start and finish of each note are always very clearly defined. Phil Jones amps and cabs have a unique voice, but I wouldn't call it "coloration"; it's more that sonic information is conveying to your ears by a novel method—the 5-inch mini-woofer array. I heard something different and unique from each bass I played through the Suitcase, but that distinctive PJ punch, attack, clarity, and character are ever-present.

In a moderately loud rock setting, the Suitcase can provide ample stage-filling volume, and even sufficient volume for smaller gigs with no P.A. support. That exceptional attack really allows your bass to be heard through the mix. For gig-filling volume on a low B, though, the 4B extension cab really ups the ante. The 8-ohm 4B fits perfectly underneath the Suitcase, and with this configuration the Suitcase's amp puts out 300 watts (200 watts without an extension cab). In addition to a substantial gain in volume, the 4B adds even more depth to the tone and, yes, even more piranha attack! The Suitcase/4B combo puts out gobs of clean volume, but doesn't take up much real estate on stage. And man, does it look cool!

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're looking for a rock-solid, high-quality combo amp, or if you just like to separate yourself from the crowd, you should check out the Suitcase. Its two preamp channels offer great flexibility, and even if you only ever use one channel, the Suitcase deserves consideration. Add the 4B, and you have a potent modular rig that can excel in many situations. ■



LIST PRICE
Suitcase \$1269
4B \$549
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