



PHOTOGRAPHY: JOBY SESSIONS

PJB Suitcase portable bass combo £699

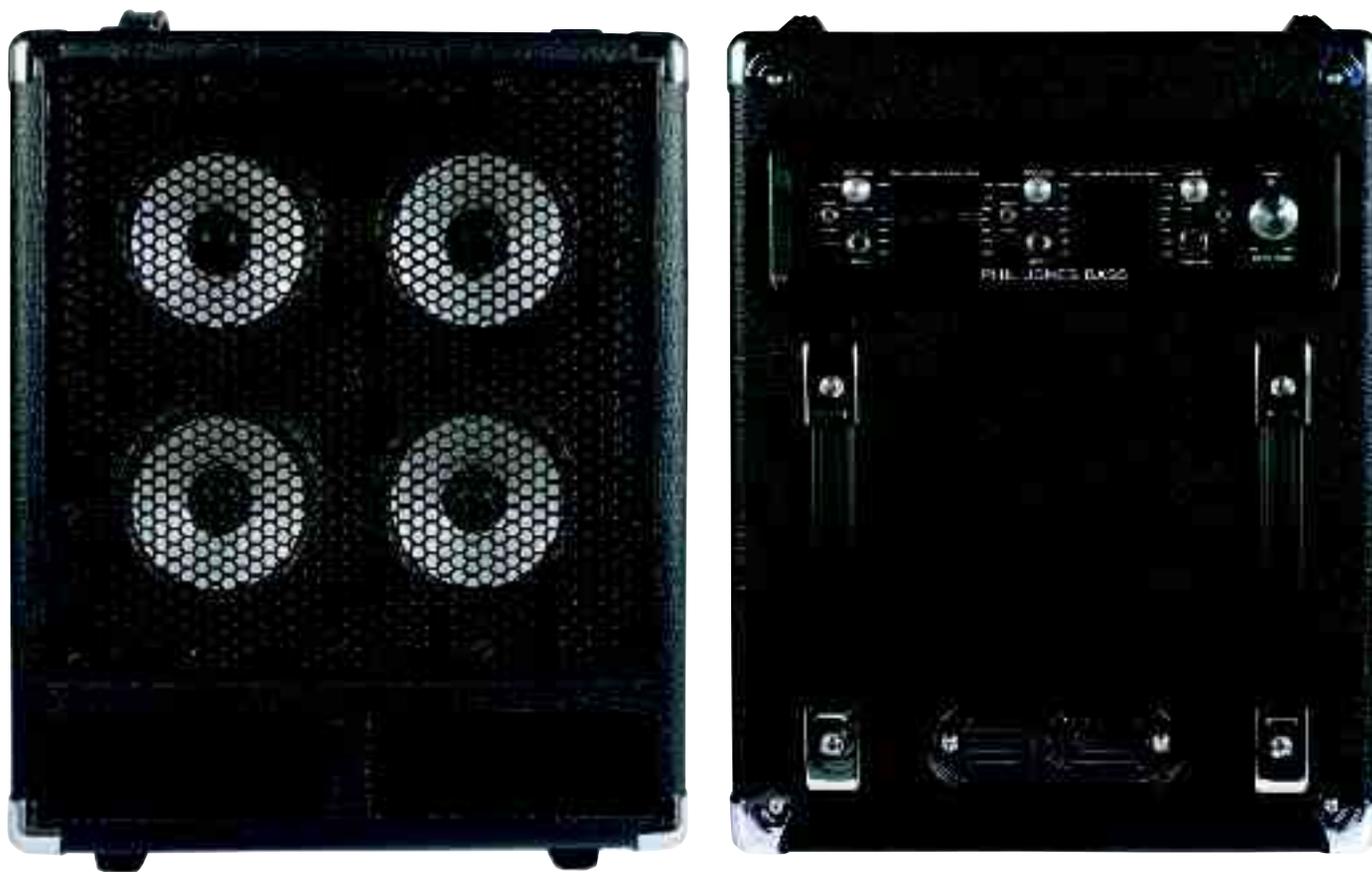
Small may be beautiful but slightly bigger is even better! We check the latest PJB by Roger Newell

Once upon a time the words 'bass' and 'portable' were never seen in the same sentence but low-frequency technology has developed enormously, particularly in recent years. One of the companies currently helping to make huge leaps in bass sound reproduction is Phil Jones Bass – we looked at their highly portable Briefcase bass combo back in issue 265, and were mightily impressed.

Where that was focused on high-quality sounds for rehearsal and recording purposes, when it came to playing with an enthusiastic drummer it simply lacked raw power. The Suitcase provides the solution by being double the Briefcase's size and boosted to three times the power.

The secret behind the company's success at miniaturisation lies with the distinctive aluminium-coned speakers.

After all, if you're using a conventional 15-inch speaker, for example, it doesn't matter how small the amplifier section is, the speaker alone dictates that the resulting combo is going to be of average size. This neatly breaks that restriction by employing these incredible five-inch units, ganged in four in this instance, and ensures that every physical dimension is kept to a minimum. Having already experienced



just how good these little devils are we asked Phil Jones what the technical advantage is in using small speakers.

“Anyone who plays bass understands that the speaker is a very important part of the sound, but very few really understand the science of loudspeakers. It is not just a question of size and power ratings. Often the mistake is that loudspeaker power ratings are simplified like the wattage of a light bulb and this could not be further from the reality. Loudspeaker power rating is very complex and it varies with the frequency and time duration of the applied signal. The most common factor of power handling today is the size of the loudspeaker voice coil’s area. When multiple speakers are used the combined coil area is far greater than a large single speaker. Large voice coil areas mean a greater dissipation of unwanted heat and that further increases the dynamic linearity of the speaker. Small cones also act more like a piston following the exact motion of the voice coil, which is tracking the exact motion of the string vibrations on the bass. The bottom line is the speakers will track what you play more accurately. Subconsciously you are no longer fighting to compensate for how you should sound and consequently you will play better.”

Even pushing the front end into distortion will produce impressively rasping sounds, and still without introducing background noise

Although the speaker configuration is the first element here to catch the eye, it’s the amplifier that dictates the initial translation of your bass sound and, again, this is something special. The Suitcase comes with two fully independent channels with identical appointments of active/passive switching, input level control with associated overload LED, and a five-band graphic EQ with sliders. The output section naturally applies to both channels and features a switchable limiter and master volume, both with LEDs plus a headphone socket. The panel to the lower rear provides jack sockets for an effects loop, tuner

connection and pre-amp output, XLR balanced line out and a Speakon connector for that all-important extension cabinet should you require one. The mains switch and heat sink for the powerful MOSFET circuitry also lie here and, sensibly, the cabinet design is fitted with runners either side of the panel to offer protection during transportation – a nice touch. There is also the added advantage of switchable AC voltage and protected circuitry that will operate just about anywhere in the world without modification – the ultimate in portability indeed. Tough construction with chromed metal corners and air vent,

PJB SUITCASE COMBO	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ WE LIKED Punchy sound, great tonal range and ultimate portability ■ WE DISLIKED Slightly awkward to carry 	

metal grille and front porting, makes the Suitcase able to withstand the trials and tribulations that any bass amp on the move is subjected to. “The cabinet is plywood but the front baffle is high-density fibreboard – one of the reasons why these cabinets sound better,” explains Jones. “The front panel is as solid as a rock and this is where the cabinet has to be the most rigid in order to reduce cabinet coloration. The cabinet is also very rigidly braced, like a good hi-fi speaker.”

SOUNDS: If you expect a tight punchy sound from this combo, you won’t be disappointed. You’ve read the theory and in practice we can confirm that there is absolutely nothing lacking from the bottom end, in fact it positively excels within the lower frequency ranges in spite of the compact size and diminutive speaker array.

The channels are identical so if you favour a particular bass guitar circuit configuration or use one of each, this will suit your needs perfectly. Being totally silent when you’re not playing only makes it seem all the more

The rivals

Mesa Boogie Walkabout Scout from £1,295
Euphonics Audio iAmp WZ 200 £1,299
Ampeg Portabass PBC2212 Combo £1,359

Hand-built in the USA, Mesa Boogie’s Walkabout Scout offers the same power rating as the Suitcase from the same MOSFET technology with a very neat amplifier that plugs into a 1 x 12 speaker housing to make a combo. It’s a great design concept and retains most of the distinctive Boogie sound characteristics. The Euphonics Audio iAmp WZ 200 offers less power at 200 watts from a digital power amp and employs a single EA 12-inch WZ full range driver. It also features a chromatic tuner with LED read out and, at just 37lbs, is very easy to truck. PortaBass combos from Ampeg are designed to give tonal clarity and power and the PBC2212 delivers a cool 250 watts through a 12-inch Neodymium speaker. It features an FX Blend control and, to assist in handling, a removable telescopic tilt back handle is included

PJB SUITCASE PORTABLE BASS COMBO £699

BASS



There is absolutely nothing lacking from the bottom end, in fact it positively excels within the lower frequency ranges in spite of the compact size

PJB SUITCASE BASS COMBO

PRICE: £699

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Portable bass combo, solid-state amplifier with soft clip feature

OUTPUT: 300 watts RMS @ 8 Ohms

SPEAKERS: 4 x 5-inch proprietary, extended-range drivers

DIMENSIONS: 349.25 (w) x 444.5 (d) x 419mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22.22/49

CHANNELS: Two, both with active/passive input switching

CONTROLS: Input level and five-band EQ for each channel plus master volume and limiter

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Headphone output, balanced XLR line out with ground lift, optical limiter, preamp output, extension speaker output, dual ac voltage 120/240V operation with sophisticated circuit protection

RANGE OPTIONS:

Briefcase 100W combo (£475); Six-Pak 720W combo (£1,499);

Matched extension speaker cabinet (£299)
Synergy Distribution
01827 313134
www.synergymusic.co.uk



The output offers switchable limiter and master volume, plus a headphone port

dynamic when you do hit a note. The tonal range is also commendable with a thick and fruity bottom-end response while the top end has a snappiness that ensures note clarity.

Whether using a regular four-string, a fretless or a five-string bass, the Suitcase will happily handle all you throw at it: from top frets to the low B, and, again thanks to the hi-fi like quality, allows the natural sound of any instrument to shine. The limiter not only gives heavy playing security but also focuses the overall sound, so whatever playing style you adopt, the Suitcase will respond with conviction. Even pushing the front end into distortion will produce impressively rasping sounds and without background noise. "I hate amps that produce a lot of noise as all that hum

and hissing gets in the way of the music," adds Phil Jones. "I vowed to build an amp that was extremely quiet when it comes to noise. All PJB amps have the best signal-to-noise ratio compared to any other bass unit and the power rating is very conservative."

Although by no means heavy to carry, the dual handle system is not the most obvious route so we asked Phil why he chose this solution. "Because I have two hands!" he joked. "We tried one in the centre but it was more difficult to carry. We also looked at wheels and a telescopic handle. I went with something plain and simple that may not be ideal but it's functional."

Verdict

Whereas the Briefcase was primarily a practice combo the Suitcase is made

for gigging. Ideally it would be used with an extension cabinet to get full benefit from the power rating but, as it stands, it is still capable of coping with a large number of gigging situations. So for a combined outlay of a grand you have one mightily powerful and portable mini-stack. We cannot overstate the fullness of sound and delivery available here that defies the physical size. Although this is primarily a bass amplifier, thanks to its hi-fi sound characteristics it performs equally as well with an electrified acoustic guitar, an acoustic electric jazz sound or, apparently, even a Fender Rhodes.

Out of interest we asked Phil what sort of response there had been from British bass players to his products so far. "Many British bass players have known about us as a manufacturer for some time now and in fact quite a few bought PJB direct from the USA long before we had Synergy as our distributor. I think that many bass players in the UK are conscious about great quality. I am a Brit myself and am proud that my education and learning about sound was from there. The UK has a great reputation worldwide as being on the pinnacle of great sound engineering. PJB may well be seen by some as an American amp but it's a British design all the way through." Nice to know we can still come up with the goods! 🇬🇧

PJB Suitcase bass combo

Guitarist RATING

