



The rivals

Peavey Combo 115 £599
SWR Workingman's 15

£699

Roland D-Bass 115 £749

Being such a popular configuration, there are simply loads of 15-inch bass combos on the market today offering all shapes, sizes and prices. The brand new Roland D-Bass 115 is a good example as it's robustly built, delivering 300-watts and with a bi-amp structure to expand its potential. Slightly less money will buy you the SWR Workingman's 15 and although it has less power at 160-watts, it does have that attractively sounding aural enhancer and another truly classic sound imprint. The Peavey is much more moderately priced but still kicks out a healthy 200-watts and features a highly efficient seven-band EQ

Fender Bassman 250/115 Bass Combo £629

The Bassman returns with a higher spec, but sadly without its former beauty by Roger Newell

Fender originally introduced the Bassman combo in 1951 to service their newly released Precision Bass and, like the bass itself, they got a great deal of the design right from the outset. Its single 15-inch speaker was a winner and it looked impressive too. Yet, in spite of continually producing viable bass models in recent years, the company has focused significantly more on the guitar market rather than the development of bass amplification.

Now, however, Fender has relaunched its bass models with a whole revamp of designs and ranges. The new Bassman products are upgraded with more power and are set at a price that sits comfortably between their new Rumble practice amps and the full-on Pro Series.

The two most popular combo configurations for bass players these days are the single 15-inch speaker and the dual 10-inch formats. The traditional stylists tend to opt for the warmer sounds associated with the 15-inch driver whilst the modernists like the tighter, punchier sound of the 2 x 10. We take a closer look at the 1 x 15...

Sporting the original 'block-styled' Fender nameplate from the fifties, this somewhat angular design may seem less organic than some of those early classic models of the past but no one can deny that the clean lines are very contemporary. The tough plywood cabinet features a front port slit beneath the speaker baffle and is covered in practical black carpet material with a protective metal grille. By contrast, the control panel is brushed aluminium so it really stands out. The single input socket is supported by a volume control, pad switch and LED indicators to help achieve the optimum level from your bass whether power assisted or not.

Many bass combos today feature sliders for the EQ section but Fender has stuck to rotary controls. There's still plenty of tonal manipulation to hand though, particularly with the low and high semi-parametric midrange section with adjustments for both frequency and level. In addition, there is a contour control providing a scooping effect to this midrange that will particularly appeal to the more

percussive-styled players. Bass and treble controls take care of the tonal extremes so this proves to be a very well equipped, sound-shaping combo with the Room Balance providing yet another option. Like the contour control, this is something like an EQ pre-shape as it totally alters the tone, but the emphasis is markedly different. Compression is provided, and if you're using effects then the blend control will allow you to achieve the perfect balance between your clean and effected sound.

A balanced line XLR output on the front panel with an associated level control provides a send from the amp to a PA system. In addition, we have switches for pre/post tone circuit, and a ground lift switch to alleviate any unwanted earth noise should it occur. The mute switch, master volume and illuminating mains isolator wrap up the front panel leaving the back panel to house the various linking opportunities – tuner output, an effects loop and a headphone jack as well as an additional auxiliary input for playing along with tape or CD for rehearsal purposes. The



high-frequency horn is also provided with an attenuator so you can adjust the impact to suit your requirements. It seems that Fender has thought of just about everything you could want and with a healthy 250-watts of output, this is an extremely practical unit to use.

Although possessing this substantial sonic potential, we felt the styling was a little on the bland side compared with the Bassman's earlier, original incarnation. However, it is neat and the relatively lightweight design means that it's highly practical and easy to tote around for gigs.

There's a cleanness to the overall sound here and background noise is all but non-existent, even when the amp is idling on maximum power

SOUNDS: Arguably one of the best bass sounds ever is found by playing a Fender bass through a Fender amp. There's that sort of 'correctness' about it and, thankfully, that element still applies with this new Bassman. Along with such righteousness, it packs a very powerful punch and of course does much more than purely cater for the company's own instruments.

There's a cleanness to the overall sound here (always a highly desirable quality) and background noise is all but non-existent, even when the amp is idling on max power. The midrange section is excellent for emphasising those attractive hollow sounds or

adding some meat to the basic delivery. This provides the backbone from which the punch and power can project so there's just loads of oomph to hand. The top end provided by the treble control is gentle and smooth and never causes the sound to become brittle – even when pushed to the max, and is at its most effective when using a pick rather than the fingers.

The Contour control offers a gentle sweep from treble to bass emphasis and can be used to heighten individual notes or to allow the harmonic frequencies to shine. The centre-

detente on the room balance offers a good positional reference point for this curious control – it can help correct venue sound deficiencies as it has plenty of muscle and there's some serious sub-bass to be found here too. Or if that element should actually be a problem then at the other extreme the control is able to correct the problem by thinning down excess. It's a very useful addition, and very dynamic too.

As the compression is set at a fixed threshold, all you're really adjusting is the degree of attack. Compared to other combos it seems overly subtle and only useful for avoiding peaks in your playing so, like the treble control,

BASSMAN 250/115	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Return of some classic Fender bass sounds, easily focused midrange

■ **WE DISLIKED** Compression could be more dynamic, lack of sex appeal in design



it's most effective when using a pick. Also, when adjusting it's easy to turn that large volume control accidentally.

Verdict

Built for portability, yet man enough to take the strains of gigging, the new Bassman combos are squarely aimed at today's working bass player and we can heartily agree with the 'Tone and Power' statement on the related Fender adverts. As a standalone unit it performs exceptionally well, but with the XLR DI connection it can handle a much wider variety of performance situations than its output potential may at first suggest.

We particularly like this 15-inch driver combination and slap players will probably love this almost as much as the 2 x 10 version because the midrange is dynamic and so easy to focus. But you can expect even more tightness and punch from the alternative 2 x 10 configuration and we would suggest you try and compare both to find out which suits best.

It is a real shame that we've lost all of the visual elements of the original Bassman, once considered to be one of the best-looking amplifiers around. However, the design here is both modern and practical, and the Bassman's sonic potential makes it a welcome return to the bass amp market for the company. It's a very high performance combo that retains the best of the classic Fender sounds, if not its classic design. **F**

Fender Bassman 250/115 Bass Combo

■ **Guitarist RATING** ★★★★★

FENDER BASSMAN 250/115 BASS COMBO

PRICE: £629.99

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single channel, solid-state bass combo

OUTPUT: 250-watts RMS @ four ohms

DIMENSIONS: 584 (w) x 365 (d) x 641mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb):

28.6/63

CHANNELS: One with -6 dB input pad switch

CONTROLS: Input volume, compressor, room contour, bass, low and high semi-parametric midrange, treble, line out with level control, pre/post switch and ground lift switch, mute switch, master volume

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Speaker out (unplug internal cable to use with external cabinet), effects loop (send and return), headphone input, phono aux in, tuner out

SPEAKERS: 15-inch Fender special design Eminence USA PRO speakers, compression driver high frequency horn with attenuator control

RANGE OPTIONS: Bassman 250/210 Combo (£649.99); Bassman 100 Combo (£399.99) and Bassman 150 Combo (£499.99)

Fender GBI 01342

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