



Trace Elliot AH1000-12 & 1048H cabinet

£1,299 & £599

Enhancing the old and embracing the new, the classic Brit
bass amp brand, Trace Elliot, returns! by Roger Newell

Trace Elliot has had a chequered recent history (see p138) but the one-time king of British bass amplification is back and determined to regain lost ground. Following the seemingly pointless acquisition of the company by the Gibson Corporation, and the eventual cessation of production, it seemed that one of the best-known and loved British amplifier brands was gone forever. Thankfully a new chapter is opening and Trace Elliot – now owned by USA giant Peavey – rises again with an exciting new design that cleverly retains the visual integrity of the brand while taking advantage of material improvements over the intervening years. The result is stunning, and a credit to designer Paul Stevens.

AH1000 head

The iconic red and green input and output volumes flanking a 12-band Graphic EQ are retained as part of a very symmetrical layout. All controls have highlighting to make them easier to see in a working environment, and this is aided further by an illumination layer sandwiched behind the metal front plate giving this a more three-dimensional look. This display can be adjusted for brightness by means of a multi-step dimmer control at the rear.

Along with the new design comes new technology using an advanced MOSFET power stage and an anti-clip circuit between the preamp and the power stage, protecting speakers and avoiding unwanted distortion. The preamp is fitted with an ECC83 (12AX7) valve to add the tonal warmth we like and controllable front-end distortion ranging from subtle to overdrive mayhem: bass distortion is favoured by bands such as Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and The Killers, and using drive and blend regulates the valve sounds as required.

There is just a single input with the hi/lo switch for optimum bass level and a gain with five LEDs to give a visual representation of what's going on. The reds acknowledge where clipping is occurring and the second stays illuminated, like on a PA desk, to show that you need to reduce the gain.

The tonal heart of the AH1000 comes from the expansive 12-band graphic EQ, but the thoughtful inclusion of the pre-shape control also gives you a great, instantly recognisable Trace Elliot sound on which to build.

The sophisticated dual band compressor also uses new technology, with circuitry similar to DBX studio compression employing both low and

high band controls. This smoother sounding 'soft knee' ability allows for multi-band compression, which should enhance any playing style. For instance, adjusting the controls allows for using a pick without the compressor – killing the initial attack – but it also really tightens and fattens your sound.

The loop switch obviously kicks in the attached effects and mute is the tool for tuning silently on stage or changing basses. Cunningly, the input level indicators still operate when this function is in use so you can preset your new level without being heard.

The comprehensive bank of sockets on the back panel confirms that this head is aimed at the professional. Just about any equipment linking that you're likely to require is possible and all sockets stay in phase regardless of control positioning, so there's no chance of power loss or signal cancellation. There are even two footswitch sockets so you can have a second footswitch located in a different place (either side of stage, perhaps, or one backstage with your tech) or it could be used with a patch cable to connect a second amp.

The switchable series or parallel effects loop has a level control and hi and lo pass options with left, right and

mono return sockets to get the best out of any external effects. For instance, connect chorus into high pass with stereo output working on the upper frequencies

and perhaps an octaver into the low pass. There's no cross talk between the individual effects so the octaver doesn't become confused by the harmonic frequencies associated with the chorus and the chorus doesn't sound muddy. The end result is significantly cleaner and more efficient effects!

The balanced DI output with earth lift has pre-EQ left and right XLR sockets, and because all sockets are in phase you can link both of these in the studio. There's also a tuner connection, left and right line outs to link with other power amps and two speaker outputs in both Speakon and jack configurations.

1048H cabinet

Using Peavey's excellent building facilities in Corby, and fashioned from poplar ply, this is a light and very strong cabinet that features internal cross-bracing for increased rigidity, robustness and bottom end response. Covered in black diamond patterned material like the head, it has a split metal front grille for a sharp new look that leaves the horizontal front porting slots and the HF horn fully exposed. ➔

TRACE ELLIOT AH1000-12 HEAD

PRICE: £1,299 (TBC)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Solid-state bass combo with preamp valve
OUTPUT: 500 watts RMS @ 4 ohms

DIMENSIONS: 491mm (w) x mm (d) x 158mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 22/48

CHANNELS: Single channel

CONTROLS: Input gain, drive, blend, 12-band EQ, low band, high band, output level, plus switches for: hi lo, preshape, valve, graphic equaliser, compressor, loop, mute

ADDITIONAL

FEATURES: Multi-option effects connection, panel light dimmer, DI facilities

RANGE OPTIONS:

AH500-7 with seven-band EQ head (£699); AH500-12 with 12-band EQ head to follow shortly

Trace Elliot

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TRACE ELLIOT 1048H CABINET

PRICE: £599 (TBC)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Front ported bass enclosure with horn
OUTPUT: 800 watts RMS @ 4 ohms

DIMENSIONS: 615mm (w) x 435mm (d) x 683mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 35/76

ADDITIONAL

FEATURES: Cabinet linking sockets, horn attenuation

SPEAKERS: Own specification Celestions

RANGE OPTIONS:

1028H 2 x 10 Cabinet (£449); 1518 1 x 15 Cabinet (£499); 1518C Compact 1 x 15 Cabinet (£399)

With plenty of meaty substance in the bottom end, a forceful mid-range section and punchy, higher frequencies, it's the TE sound we knew and loved



The AH1000-12's footswitch duplicates the switches on its front panel

The rivals

Ashdown AL-AD600/ABM-414 £1,099/£649
 Ampeg SVT3 PRO/BSE 410HLF £1,100/£730
 Eden WT-600 Roadrunner/Eden D-410XLT £1,300/£1,000

Power is the name of the game here so, like the Trace Elliot, these heads ideally need a pair of cabinets rather than a single 4 x 10 as presented here. Ashdown is a fellow British manufacturer and the Audio Lab AL-AD600 amp also features a 12-band EQ, but this pairing is slightly less powerful and that's reflected in the price. Ampeg also fairs well in the price stakes and the amp also uses MOSFET technology. This 2U Rackmount head offers 450W of output and a nine-band graphic equaliser. Eden is well known for its excellent quality and flexibility and the WT-600 Roadrunner head boasts the usual Eden features with a tad more power. While the amp seems very competitive the dual ported 4 x 10 will stretch your pocket

AH1000-12 HEAD	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Fresh look; familiar layout; quality performance
 ■ **WE DISLIKED** Size-to-weight ratio: this is one mighty heavy beast!

Loaded with four 200-watt Celestion drivers made to TE's specification, this has to be the company's best ever cab, making full use of all that experience gained over the years. Connections are included for daisy chaining more cabinets or fitting a horn attenuator, and the price also includes a durable canvas cover and a Speakon lead to encourage their use!

Of course, as this head is designed to deliver a wide range of tones you will obviously need more than one cabinet to get the full benefit (up to four can be used!). Coupling the 4 x 10 cab with a 1 x 15 will unleash the full power and potential that is available: the difference is quite astounding. If you can afford the whole stack then do go for it, but even with the reduction in performance values using just the 4 x 10 this is still a great way to start building your Trace Elliot backline.

SOUNDS: There's an air of authority here and that instils confidence even before you've turned anything on. On activation, the amp defaults to the pre-shape setting and instantly that Trace Elliot trademark sound is presented to send a shiver of expectancy right down your spine. There's also a reassuring

familiarity about the control panel, and it follows the logical progression of the signal path from left to right. The new-look Trace Elliot EQ operates at wider spaced frequencies, ideally suited for bass and for getting that distinctive sound. Anyone with previous experience knows this means plenty of meaty substance in the bottom end, a forceful mid-range section and punchy higher frequencies. It's the TE sound we knew and loved; circa 2006 it just comes with even more flexibility.

For added convenience the AH1000-12 comes with a six-function footswitch duplicating the switches on the front panel. Each has a correspondingly coloured LED and as the front panel and the footswitch 'talk' to each other they stay in synch whichever switches you use. As all employ FET triggering they're super quiet in operation, even when running at very high volume.

Verdict

There's obviously been a lot of thought put into this project and it goes way beyond just supplying a powerful bass head. This very practical design takes account of all the choices and connections a bass player might have



1048H CABINET	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** Great new look
 ■ **WE DISLIKED** At this weight and price, no complaints

to take on stage, in the studio, or even just rehearsing. The effects loop is one of the most comprehensive we've seen and the more you look at the back panel, the more possibilities present themselves, such as bi-amping and that effective usage of the level control as a volume boost.

The AH1000-12 and associated cabinets present a very welcome return for Trace Elliot, not only to its former standing but potentially much more. Now with a much greater flexibility of sound this will undoubtedly find favour beyond the aficionados, so we expect to see a lot more of this impressive range. **G**

Trace Elliot AH1000-12 head

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Trace Elliot 1048H cabinet

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

FROM PILLAR TO POST

We re-trace the TE story... so far! by Roger Newell

Like many great brands Trace Elliot was started from humble beginnings, by a bunch of musicians working in the Soundwave music shop in Romford, Essex. Manager Alan Morgan was a bass player and to satisfy his own needs and those of his bass playing customers, he required a bass set-up with more power, flexibility and better build quality than the general models available within a seemingly restricted UK market. Shop owner Fred Friedlein and Stuart Watson (something of an electronics wiz) answered the call and built custom amps in the back of the shop while drummer and carpenter John Clements built the sturdy plywood cabinets.

The initial amps were greeted with great enthusiasm and, as production began, a name was obviously needed. Friedlein knew that he wanted a professional sounding and preferably a double-barrelled name like Seymour Duncan or Mesa/Boogie. Inspiration came one night in the Victoria pub, in 1979. He liked 'Trace' because it had connections with sine wave and indeed the Soundwave shop name. Their Australian technical designer, Andy Perry, came up with 'Elliot' because he felt it sounded classy and very British. And so, the Trace Elliot brand was born.

Initially the company only made bass amplification, and during the bass boom of the eighties it positively flourished. All the best pro bass players were using TE gear, and a great number of semi-pros were too. The Blockheads' Norman Watt-Roy had one of the earliest rigs: "I've always used Trace Elliot. My cabs were made in 1978 by a flight case company and fitted with JBC K140 speakers and in all that time I've only had them re-coned once."

Trace had a sound that was like no other: tightly focused, offering great projection with plenty of 'thump'. Those eighties rigs were particularly impressive when used by slap players and fretless players alike – the predominant styles of the day. And with players as diverse as Mike Rutherford of Genesis and Mark King of Level 42 singing its praises, the company was riding on a marketing high.

In 1984, Mark Gooday joined Trace Elliot as production director and became MD two years later. Stuart Watson went on to launch Decimax while Gooday helped build the company into a world-leading brand: in 1988 they received the Queen's award for export. It was during this time that Trace Elliot created numerous firsts: the first to produce a bass specific 4 x 10 cabinet, the first MIDI programmable graphic equaliser on the MP11 and, stepping outside of the bass market, the world's first dedicated



Mark Gooday was Trace Elliot MD for over 10 years, before launching Ashdown Amplification

acoustic guitar amplification range. Not surprising then that outside interest in the company was on the increase and, eventually, Fred Friedlein and Mark Gooday sold the company to Kaman Music in 1992 – the same year that Paul Stevens came on board to work on design.

Gooday was retained on a five-year contract as MD, while Friedlein retired from the music business for a period. It was during this time that the T-Bass was introduced with a design that borrowed heavily on Fender's Jazz, but with an unusual angled headstock negating the need for string trees. At the end of the five-year period both Kaman and Mark Gooday felt that it was better they parted ways. Kaman was disposing of companies at the time and Mark put forward an offer to the president of Kaman, CW Kaman II, but when the offer was refused Mark left the company in March 1997 and set up his own project, Ashdown Engineering.

The rest of the management stepped in and bought TE back the same year, but it was short-lived. In 1998 Trace Elliot became the property of the mighty Gibson Corporation. This should have meant a grand new lease of life as the brand name was still highly regarded. However, much to the amazement of the British music industry, Gibson did little to further the company's reputation. In fact, in a move to streamline the ranges and create greater productivity they managed to knock the stuffing out of the brand by introducing dubious 'improvements' and reduced it to a shadow of its former self.

Peavey has now taken the Trace Elliot brand under its protective wing with the intent of restoring the company to its former glory. Paul Stevens was invited on board from the start, and with new units now in production and many from the former TE team are involved – as well as some of the original machinery. Those heady days of the eighties, where much of the focus was on bass, are not about to return, but as Trace Elliot has long been an all encompassing amplification manufacturer its future is once again looking bright, and green!



The 7 Band series emerged under the brand's ownership by Gibson

Below: the flagship V8 head of the nineties, used by John Entwistle among others



Trace had a sound that was like no other: tightly focused with plenty of 'thump'...



Early Trace Elliot adopter, Mark King