

FISHMAN SOLOAMP ~~\$1,299~~  
MISCELLANEOUS



PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON LEE

# Fishman SoloAmp £1,299

The latest take on portable PA from the world's leading acoustic pickup maker *by Mick Taylor*

**P**A gear is the musical equivalent of road tax for most guitarists: inconvenient, complicated and expensive, but sadly unavoidable nonetheless. Moreover, they who rely on it most – acoustic singer-songwriters – are often blessed with all the technical prowess of a breeze block. Thank goodness, then, that in recent years more and more companies have sought to pack ever more power and functionality into ever smaller, more portable formats. Fishman, acoustic pickup and amplification giant, now enters the fray with the SoloAmp, a two-channel amp/PA designed for singer-songwriters and solo performers. Six four-inch speakers and a two-inch tweeter sit vertically in the column-style enclosure – so it's up near your ears where you and the audience can hear it – and the whole shebang pumps out a healthy 220 watts.

## In Use

The package is clearly designed for musos on the move and a number of practicalities impress. First, the two heavy-duty bags that carry the amp and stand respectively clip together so you can manage it all in one hand. Secondly, when you unzip the amp's bag, you're presented with a central recessed handle in the back of the amp, making for easy placement on the stand that, thirdly, has a little foam cushion to soften the 'thwack' when you drop it down into the recessed pole mount. These small but significant things mean that a minute-and-a-half after walking in the door, you're ready to plug in: superb. Also, it's worth mentioning that things like bags/covers and cables are a significant extra expense with a lot of 'normal' PA gear. Not so here, as everything you need is included.

The SoloAmp's feature set is matched perfectly to the one-man show: two independent channels that can handle, most obviously, a vocal mic and an electro acoustic. The channels each have a three-

band EQ section – bass, middle and treble – a dedicated effects loop so you can use pedals of your choice and in-built reverb. There are also a couple of sensible feedback-busting perks, plus there are enough ins and outs for using backing tracks and connecting to a bigger rig if necessary. Individual channel DI outs give ultimate control, and a global DI takes the mixed signal from both channels.

With Fishman's track record, it comes as no surprise that the SoloAmp functions superbly as an acoustic guitar amplifier in its own right. A thorough workout with Fishman, LR Baggs and B-Band pickups in Martin, Larrivée and Lakewood guitars respectively demonstrates how simple it is to dial in a solid, quality amplified acoustic sound. It's a very clean-sounding system, and therefore faithfully reproduces whatever you shove in the front. Despite the lack of bells and whistles such as flashy parametric mids, tonal switches and so on, the EQ range is excellent. With good quality sources, we're left wanting nothing in terms of tweakability – quite the opposite in fact: our Sennheiser e935 and Shure Beta 58 vocal mics sound crisp, clear and punchy, while the Larrivée/LR Baggs combination in particular sounds exceptional. Despite the cabinet dimensions and absence of any sort of subwoofer, bass response is surprisingly full and weighty, certainly weighty enough for clear electro-acoustics and voices. At the other end, the sparkling top-end presents picking dynamics well – and, indeed, fret noise. Despite the slim design, it's surprising just how wide the SoloAmp projects its sounds as long as you site it a few feet behind you.

The key benefit of the SoloAmp is that there's enough volume and projection to be heard clearly, with the significant benefit of it functioning as monitoring and out-front sound simultaneously: you hear pretty much exactly what the audience hears. The

downside of course is that if your mates are telling you they can't hear you sing, you can no longer blame it on the long-suffering sound engineer!

If one of those mates is playing too, and they also have a SoloAmp, one useful function is that you can connect the two systems via their monitor in and out XLRs. Plugged into each other, you can then use the monitor knobs to control how much of the other person you hear through your system: it's the perfect set-up for a duo scenario.

Being able to adjust the reverbs independently in the two channels is also a boon in that you might want more on the guitar

and less on the vocal, for example, or vice versa. Toggling through the four presets returns progressively longer digital 'verbs' ranging from a short room type, to a more expansive, bright cathedral type. And very good they sound too – perfect for ambience as long as you don't

## The Rivals

Also taking the upright route is **Bose's** impressive **L1 Model II system** with T1 Tonematch module (£2,098). Brilliant, and reviewed last issue. The **HK Audio Lucas Smart** (£1,249, complete with stands/cables/bags etc) is a compact two-satellite-plus-bass-bin system though it has limited inputs and no on-board effects. The **SR Technology Jam 400** (£949) is a neat one-box solution offering plenty of input/channel options plus in-built digital effects.



The two independent channels make the SoloAmp perfect for the one-man show



overdo it. Now just plug in a backing track to the aux input, tweak the level, and you have the whole performance covered. It takes a stereo/TRS 6.4mm jack that sums the stereo signal from a CD/mp3 player to mono.

If you are pushing the volume high, the anti-feedback filter can help. It sweeps through subsonic (off) to around 330Hz when turned fully clockwise. As Fishman points out, the most troublesome feedback frequencies for acoustic guitars are in this range: those resonances that cause problems if your song includes a pedal note on, say, an F#, and that just happens to be where the guitar starts howling. If you do have a rumble, it's a quick and easy fix: simply turn the knob until the problematic frequency range is cut. One additional benefit of this feature is that if the room you're playing in has an awkward resonant rumble, you can ease it with the anti-feedback control too: it works. The phase switches help in this respect too,

by flipping the phase of the signal. In the absence of feedback issues, you'll find that one position of the phase switch sounds better than the other – there's no 'correct' setting, just the one your ears tell you is right.

### Verdict

The SoloAmp is a superbly conceived and executed idea. The obvious application is to plug in a vocal mic and an acoustic guitar for hassle-free solo performances. There are enough features and volume to do small gigs, but it's not full of stuff you'll never use. You may wish for more channels if you use more than one guitar, however.

On top of that, it'd also be a credible amp choice for anyone into hybrid guitars – those that cover electric and acoustic sounds such as Taylor's T-5, for example – because the full-range response does acoustic sounds full justice in one channel, while you could use a Line 6 POD or similar in the other channel for your electric guitar sounds.

The stickier issue – as is becoming the case with a lot of imports vis-à-vis our ailing UK currency – is the price. £1,299 is a lot of money, though it is still significantly less than the albeit better spec'd but fussier Bose L1 System II rig. In that respect, we could certainly see room for a more powerful but only marginally more expensive version, which would have more channels for duos. Nevertheless, as it is and for small bar and café-type solo performance sound reinforcement – as opposed to being used as a full-blown mega PA – the SoloAmp is certainly up to the job and comes highly recommended. **G**

### The Bottom Line

**We like:** Practical design; sensible range of features; good sound

**We dislike:** Front panel controls could be further recessed for protection; do you need more channels?

**Guitarist says:** A super one-box solution for solo performer sound reinforcement

With Fishman's track record, it comes as no surprise that the SoloAmp functions superbly as an acoustic guitar amplifier



### Fishman SoloAmp

**PRICE:** £1,299 (inc high-quality carrying bags)

**ORIGIN:** China

**TYPE:** Full range two-channel PA system

**POWER:** 220 watts

**EFFECTS/FEATURES:** Independent three-band EQ, independent reverb (four types), 48V phantom power, independent effects loops, mute feature, anti-feedback circuit, tweeter with level control, phase switches, -10dB pad switches

**CONNECTIONS:** XLR in x 2, 6.4mm jack in x 2, 6.4mm tuner out, balanced master XLR out, independent channel XLR DI outs, send and return 6.4mm jacks for each channel, 6.4mm stereo TRS jack aux in, XLR monitor in and out, mute footswitch jack 6.4mm out

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 15.9/35 (inc bag & stand)

**RANGE OPTIONS:** None

**DIMENSIONS:** 1055 (h) 145 (w) x 168cm (d) when assembled

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### Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



The whole system packs down into two bags that clip together for easy transport. Wheels too – woo!