

Quicktest

Peavey MAX115 Bass Combo £309

More compact than ever, but with an even bigger delivery

CONTACT: Peavey **PHONE:** 01536 461234 **WEB:** www.peavey.com

Peavey has undoubtedly learned the knack of maximising on output from its bass stacks and combos, but with this latest upgrade of the MAX range, it has achieved even more. Although the overall dimensions have been reduced, this combo still packs a meaty 300 watts of punch – and its tuned cabinet features a 15-inch speaker and a tweeter, with Peavey's DDT speaker-protection circuit that prevents overloading. Suitable for any bass, all the controls and connections are located on the front panel of the amp section, which neatly forms part of the fascia above the expanded metal grille. Each control features an associated push on/off switch to expand the tonal possibilities, and the logical panel design is very user-friendly. There are no frills or fuss, just all the necessary circuitry to get the best sounds out of your bass and deliver them with impact.

Sounds

With switchable options for each rotary control, the tonal variations are comprehensive. TransTube Boost adds a bit of crunchy overdrive to the front end, while punch and bright



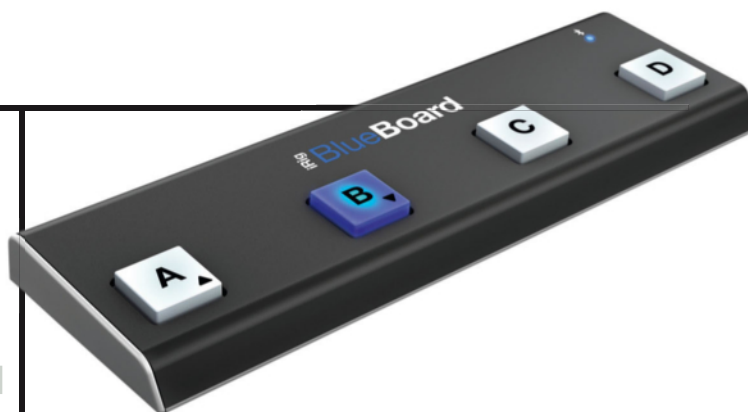
switches do exactly what they say. The middle control features a shift option to alter the working frequencies of the range so that you can get that important area working to your best advantage. And with that tough 15-inch driver, it's near impossible to get a bad sound from the MAX115.

Verdict

Known for ease of use and good on-the-road reliability, this newly compacted combo will appeal to any regular gigging bass player. **[RN]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Compact, affordable and much louder than expected, with a good-sounding and wide tonal range, this is a no-brainer small gig amp



IK Multimedia iRig BlueBoard £79

Wireless stomping for your iOS device

CONTACT: IK Multimedia **PHONE:** 0800 0934 066 **WEB:** www.ikmultimedia.com

Using a laptop or an iOS device as your onstage 'amp' may just have become a little easier with the release of IK Multimedia's iRig BlueBoard. What you get from the creators of AmpliTube is a MIDI pedalboard that communicates wirelessly via Bluetooth with iOS devices and Mac computers, so you can carry out switching functions for your amp-sim software or any other MIDI-compatible music apps. Battery powered and built to survive the rigours of a stage, the BlueBoard offers four backlit soft-touch pads, plus the connectivity for adding a couple of expression pedals to the setup, for real-time wah and more.

In Use

To use the BlueBoard, you first need to install its app on your iOS device or computer – note that it uses Bluetooth LE, so won't work with some older iOS devices. The app will then run in the background, translating Bluetooth messages

to MIDI. You can send Bank Change, MIDI Program Changes and MIDI Control Changes, which in practical terms means that, once you've set it up, you can easily change patches, turn virtual stompboxes on and off and initiate parameter changes when using the likes of AmpliTube and GarageBand.

Verdict

You'll still have to plug your guitar into your device with an audio interface, but the BlueBoard could keep things uncluttered underfoot while giving your apps a new practicality. So, if the sound of amp sims does it for you, here's your chance to ditch your amp and travel light. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: If you're brave enough to leave amp and effects at home in favour of the virtual world and MIDI, the BlueBoard may be your new best friend



Positive Grid BIAS £13.99

Tweakable amp sims for your iPad

CONTACT: Positive Grid PHONE: N/A WEB: www.positivegrid.com

Guitar players with iPads have access to plenty of amp sims and practice aids these days. But Positive Grid, the company behind the JamUp app, has come up with a new amp sim app that's quite different from what's available so far for iOS.

BIAS lets you get in and tweak the amp sounds to a massive degree. It's not dissimilar to Peavey's (Mac and PC) ReValver in operation in that it allows you to mess around at component level – changing the virtual valves, swapping transformers and much more. It also supports the AudioBus and Inter-App Audio protocols, which means that it isn't just a standalone app – you can actually take any of the amps from BIAS and use them in other apps such as JamUp, GarageBand, Cubase and Auria, allowing you access to a whole new array of amp

sounds for your practice and recording apps.

In Use

BIAS has 36 amp models available and these are grouped in a number of categories – clean, glassy, blues, cruncish, hi gain, metal, blues, arsonic and bass. Select one of these categories, and the four amps in each are displayed. Choose one of these and you'll get a graphic of its front panel, with knobs laid out for adjustment. The basic available amps – Marshalls, Fenders and the like, and even a Dumble – all sound really good anyway, and are responsive to playing dynamics.

But if you want to make a few tonal changes, just tap a little cog in the graphic and you'll be taken to the next page where you get access to its preamp, tone stack, power amp,

transformer and cabinet with mic selection and placement. There are also switchable eight-band EQ sections at the start and end of the signal chain. You can easily dive in and start tweaking parameters until you get the exact sound you want. You can then name and save an amp and even customise its looks with different Tolex, grille cloth, panel and knobs.

One press on the front panel lets you make your current amp available for use in JamUp, where you can add effects to make up a full signal chain and use the recording and jamming facilities there. Switching back and forth to the BIAS app to make changes is instant, as it also is when you use a BIAS amp as Inter-App Audio in any other app. In any compatible recording app you are using, BIAS will automatically appear

in the list of effects available to be inserted into a track – we used it to record parts in both GarageBand and Cubase.

Verdict

Providing a range of great-sounding amps for the iPad, BIAS is a virtual amp workshop with masses of options, and is a useful resource of quality sounds for recording in your other apps. It's fine for just playing through if you like your amp sounding raw with just room sound, but if you want effects you can pair it with JamUp and also get a useful practice facility. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: With realistic amp sounds, loads of editing options and easy integration with other apps, there's little to dislike ➤



MXR CSP203 La Machine, CSP233 Micro Amp Plus & CSP099 Phase 99

£139, £119 & £169

Take a trip to the Custom Shop with this new stompbox trio

CONTACT: Westside Distribution **PHONE:** 0141 248 4812 **WEB:** www.jimdunlop.com

It has long been a legendary name in effects, but of late, MXR – now part of the Dunlop empire – seemed to be hankering for something more high-end. Enter, then, the Custom Shop: a series of limited edition, high-price stompers for the more discerning pedal fiend. We've already looked at a few of these boutique-style beauties, but here, we have three in one go: the CSP203 La Machine, CSP233 Micro Amp Plus and CSP099 Phase 99.

The La Machine octave fuzz is the only pedal in this trio that isn't based on an existing MXR design, but its tones are voiced very much in the past, aiming to replicate thick 70s fuzz with both octave and regular fuzz modes. The Micro Amp Plus, meanwhile, builds on the legacy of the legendary Micro Amp boost, offering that same 26dB of gain, but with boost/cut bass

and treble knobs, plus low-noise op amps. Finally, the Phase 99 features two Phase 90 circuits in one, with independent speed controls, plus the option of stereo outputs for huge, room-filling phase. Each of the pedals comes in MXR's standard heavy-duty enclosure, with true bypass switching, powered by a nine-volt battery or PSU.

Sounds

Octave fuzz is an acquired taste, and La Machine is no different, recalling the similarly abrasive Foxx Tone Machine. Anything past nine o'clock on the gain dial yields colossal fuzz and pterodactyl-like screams, while less dirty sounds possess ring mod-esque overtones. Switch off the upper octave for an equally filthy yet darker fuzz, ideal for Big Muff-y psychedelic riffs, although it could struggle to cut through in a live setting.

The Micro Amp Plus, meanwhile, is the essence of simplicity. Turn the gain control up past midway to squeeze gorgeous compression and sweetness from a 15-watt valve combo and true grit from a five-watter. Crank the gain and the Micro Amp's own dirt comes into play, adding extra hair to already overdriven amps, while the bass and treble controls can cut or boost frequencies to finely sculpt your boosted tone.

There's also a great deal of flexibility with the Phase 99: as well as two speed controls, a vintage button lets you dial in the classic script Phase 90 tone, while a phase/series button provides a more or less pronounced sweep. Finally, a sync button runs both phasers at the same speed. The tones are classic Phase 90, while the additional options are likely to please phase addicts – running

in stereo offers Leslie-esque wobbles and swirls.

Verdict

Aside from the fantastic sounds, there's a real attention to detail in all three of these stompboxes. In the hands of the right player, the Phase 99 and La Machine can do a lot of sonic good, but for us, the Micro Amp Plus is something every guitarist can appreciate – the sound of an amp pushed with one is utterly addictive and makes a visit to the MXR Custom Shop well worth your time. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING

CSP203 La Machine ★★★★★
CSP233 Micro Amp Plus ★★★★★
CSP099 Phase 99 ★★★★★

Guitarist says: These worthwhile additions to the Custom Shop range build on past successes and break new tonal ground