

Roland Mobile Cube & Micro Cube RX £139 & £209

A superstar's rig for how much? We take a look at two micro versions of Roland's now starry-eyed Cube range...
by Dave Durban

We suspect that when looking for a small gigging amp a Roland Cube is not at the top of the wish list for many. However, you may be surprised to learn that this very amp line has made a plethora of appearances on some of Britain's biggest stages, including the Royal Albert Hall. Here it provided organic and rootsy tones for one of the world's brightest blues stars: Seasick Steve. Aha – so now you're interested, right?

Here we have two of Roland's newest additions to the Micro Cube line, the Mobile Cube and Micro Cube RX and like their big brothers in the range, they're positively brimming with features.

Mobile Cube

Here we are promised a 15-hour battery life and a myriad impressive features, making it

one of the most versatile and portable Cubes to date.

What strikes you on first handling is the unit's weight: it's very light and could be comfortably carried between busking positions. Aesthetically, it models a transistor radio with black grille hiding two four-inch speakers angled back for improved projection. In typical Roland style the Mobile Cube's top-panel takes on a two-tone white and grey look; it won't win any style awards but it's perfectly functional.

More controls and effects are offered than on the Micro RX. A type knob selects three guitar amp tones (clean, overdrive and dist), including an acoustic guitar simulator. There are also three stereo inputs: keyboard, instrument and audio.

Moving on, you have an instrument and separate

microphone volume, an EQ control knob that gives more or less low- and high-end and three classic effect modulations: chorus, which is switchable, and reverb/delay with control for delay speed and reverb depth.

A standout feature here is the Centre Cancel switch. Located on the top-panel, this switch minimises audio in the centre of a recorded mix; such as vocals or guitar solos. Meaning karaoke and overdubbing is possible either in the High Street or at a New Year's Eve sing-a-long.

All inputs are conveniently positioned along the sides of the unit. Here we find a standard jack microphone input and keyboard/instrument input that has mono and stereo inputs. The auxiliary inputs do not have a dedicated volume control – this has to be

The rivals

Mobile Cube

Line 6 offers the **Micro Spider** (£95.45), a six-watt battery powered amp with effect and auxiliary capabilities. A recent addition is the **Vox DA-5** (£126), a five-watt amp with switchable output levels. The **Crate TX15 Taxi** (£129 approx) offers portability and battery power for busking scenarios.

controlled from the outboard device. A point to make here is that you can connect auxiliary 3.2mm stereo inputs and stereo RCA inputs at the same time. Two auxiliary devices – such as an mp3 and CD player – can be connected in conjunction with a microphone, stereo instrument or guitar: in other words, real-world Guitar Hero.

Sounds

The Mobile Cube sounds bigger than its size suggests. The clean channel offers a slightly generic tone, but enough presence and body to cut through whether it's single-coils or humbuckers. Overdrive has a Marshall-esque flavour, with an aggressive mid-range perfect for AC/DC and blues-rock



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS



The type knob selects clean, overdrive or distortion



The RX actually offers more modelling and amp features than its peers in the Cube range

The rivals

Micro Cube RX

True contenders seem hard to come by, but the **HiWatt BSK 15/8** (£127 approx) is a dedicated solid-state busking amp, with 15-watts of power, eight-hours battery or mains power options. **Fender's G-DEC Junior** (£139.99) has a multitude of effects, a built in drum machine and even bass lines to play along with.

rhythms. Distortion lacks a little definition, with humbuckers especially, but serves up a more than faithful higher gain blues tone or even heavy metal rhythms. On all three amp simulations the effects don't seem to get swamped, there's a surprising amount of definition.

The custom-designed speakers cope well with other instruments and auxiliary inputs. There's minimal flapping and the small cab maintains good projection, making a very capable package.

Micro Cube RX

The Micro Cube RX mimics classic Cube designs with a sturdily built cabinet and strong industrial-style corner protectors. Despite a clunky appearance the physical size and layout is well conceived, displaying Roland's thought for the end user.

Situated above the built-in chromatic tuner and solo boost button are three standard EQ controls: bass, middle and treble, as well as pre-amp gain and volume control knobs. The RX benefits from Roland's Composite Object Sound Modelling (COSM) amp technology, which digitally reproduces sound characteristics of both electric and acoustic instruments. Two digital power-amps offer double the output (2.5-watts per side) of a Micro Cube; powering four custom-designed four-inch (10cm) speakers, which are housed behind a stylish speaker grille.

The RX actually offers more modelling and amp features than its peers in the Cube range, having eight amp modes, six Roland-designed effects (chorus, flanger, phaser and tremolo) and there's also a separate microprocessor for delay and reverb.

An eight-way selector knob offers eight COSM amp presets with familiar descriptions: Acoustic Sim, JC Clean (Roland Jazz Chorus), Black Panel (Fender Twin Reverb), Brit Combo (Vox AC30TB), Classic Stack (Marshall JMP1987), Metal, R-fier and Mic input.

The most defining feature of this amp, however, is the Rhythm Guide system. Like having a portable drummer it gives you the choice of 11 rhythms to practise with, including: Metronome, Rock1, Rock2, Blues, Country, R&B,

Ballad, Jazz, Funk, Latin and Dance. In addition, you can switch two variations on each patch, equalling 33 beat signatures. This can be controlled with an onboard button or via a footswitch; this will control start/stop and tap tempo options.

Sounds

As with the Mobile Cube, the RX offers a surprising amount of projection and volume. Its classic Roland COSM amp modes generally produce vibrant and faithful tones. There are, however, some favourites here: the JC Chorus with its thick clean tone, which married well with reverb and delay effects; Black Panel that with single-coils delivered a sparkly recreation of a classic pre-CBS Fender amp; and finally the Classic Stack and Brit Combo impressed with its grinding Brit-rock tonality and controlability with the gain control. We were able to gain a faithful Hendrix tone dialling in the right amount of gain and phaser to produce a Marshall/Uni-Vibe sound.

Adding reverb presents a lush springy tone while chorus keeps things nice and fluid. All effects here have typical Roland modulation design qualities – thick, full and rich tonalities that are ultimately easy to use. Other amp modes fared well, offering similar clarity and tone, but are not nearly as engaging or likeable as the modes mentioned above.



Micro Cube Bass RX £199

Also available in the RX range is the Micro Cube Bass RX (£199). It offers a similar feature-set to the guitar version, but with the obvious changes in amplifier types and effects. Its eight COSM amp types again take on familiar sounding descriptions: Octave Bass, Super Flat, Flip Top, B Man, Bass 360, Session, Concert 810 and Mic type.

With effects we have just Chorus, Flanger, T-Wah (tracker wah) and the Boost is swapped for a Compressor. This model, with the Rhythm Guide, impressed our experienced bass specialist Roger Newell a great deal.



The Rhythm Guide causes a bundle of laughs, despite also being a serious rehearsal tool. It's certainly fun and each patch encourages you to practise essential blues/rock/jazz and everything beyond. Having a dedicated volume control means that the beat doesn't dictate playing volume – if you want to play quieter with the Rhythm Guide, simply match the two output volumes. Tap Tempo, despite being a great feature, is a little clumsy in operation and takes some getting used to.

Verdict

It's hard to mark down two products like these, as any criticism is immediately tempered by their competitive price. Value-for-money is inherent across the range and none of this is lost with these new additions. Being picky we think Roland should have included a recording/DI out on the Mobile Cube, but it still remains one of the most versatile and portable amps in its class. Both the amps on review here delivered

impressive and surprising sonics and would make an excellent addition for busking duties, small rehearsals, home practice use. Maybe even the Albert Hall, eh Mr 'Sick?! ☒

The Bottom Line

Mobile Cube

We liked: Excellent versatility; value for money; portable size
We dislike: Lack of DI/recording out
Guitarist says: Pound-for-pound the Mobile Cube – in terms of sound and features – is very, very hard to beat

Mobile Cube

We liked: Practical layout; quality sounds; drummer in-a-box feature
We dislike: Nothing
Guitarist says: Whether it be practice, busking or rehearsal scenarios the RX delivers good sounds and versatile features



Roland Mobile Cube

PRICE: £139
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state, battery-powered amp
OUTPUT: Five watts stereo power (2.5 + 2.5 watts per side)
DIMENSIONS: 177 (h) x 280 (w) x 108mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.5/5.9
LOUDSPEAKER: Two Roland custom designed four-inch speakers
CHANNELS: Microphone and keyboard/instrument
CONTROLS: Power switch, tone knob, delay/reverb knob, microphone volume control. Keyboard/instrument/guitar type switch and volume knob, chorus switch, 'centre cancel' switch
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Carry strap, microphone 6.4mm jack input, guitar L/Mono, stereo inputs, auxiliary in, stereo RCA jack inputs, battery compartment, DC adaptor input
RANGE OPTIONS: Roland's Micro Cube range offers similar portability and starts with the Microcube (£95), Microcube R – a coloured alternative to the standard Micro Cube (£95), Micro Cube RX (£219) and Micro Cube Bass RX (£219)
Roland UK 01792 702701
www.roland.co.uk



Roland Micro Cube RX

PRICE: £209
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Solid-state, battery-powered amplifier with COSM modelling
OUTPUT: Five watts stereo power (2.5 + 2.5 watts per side)
DIMENSIONS: 294 (h) x 296 (w) x 207mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 6.4/14
LOUDSPEAKER: Four Roland custom designed four-inch speakers
CHANNELS: One
CONTROLS: Master volume, gain, amp type, bass, middle, treble, effects select, delay/reverb select, Rhythm Guide pattern select knob, start/stop button, tap tempo, pattern variation switch and rhythm guide volume
FOOTSWITCH: Accepts standard dual latching type
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Carry strap, stereo and mono auxiliary inputs, recording out/headphones, footswitch input, DC power input.
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Ditto the Mobile Cube



The RX's COSM technology reproduces both acoustic and electric sounds

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Test results

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