


Rocked & Rated



Vox
AGA70

ZT Lunchbox
Acoustic

Roland
AC-33



Fishman
Loudbox Mini



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find out which one
won our Group Test
head-to-head

Group Test

Acoustic gigging amps

Think it's OK to plug your electro-acoustic into an electric guitar amplifier? These **four great acoustic guitar amps** beg to differ

WORDS ED MITCHELL

Technically, you can run your electro-acoustic through a regular electric guitar amplifier. However, all you'll gain from this is volume; you certainly won't experience the full splendour of your guitar's 'voice'. You see, the speakers bolted into acoustic amplifiers are designed to produce a wider frequency range than their electric guitar centric amigos. Electric guitar speakers are voiced to remove those frequencies that could make overdrive and distortion tones sound harsh or tinny.

In other words, using anything less than an acoustic amplifier for your electro-acoustic guitar is a tonal compromise. And, frankly, that's just not good enough. Most acoustic amps also feature microphone inputs, which make them self-contained, portable public

address systems that are therefore perfect mates for solo performers.

The four amps assembled for this test are the Vox AGA70 (£317), Roland's AC-33 (£369), the diminutive ZT Lunchbox Acoustic (£389) and the Fishman Loudbox Mini (£449). All four are easy to lug about, have two channels, handle both guitar and vocals and are made by brands renowned for tonal excellence. Of course, there can only be one victor in a TG Group Test so grab an acoustic, sack your band and walk this way. ■

**"ACOUSTIC AMPLIFIERS
PRODUCE A WIDER
FREQUENCY RANGE"**



Roland AC-33 £369

Sizzlin' stereo

Build
The AC-33 may be lightweight but it has a gig-proof, rugged exterior



Controls
The onboard loop function is easy to use and infectious, too

Stand
The built-in tilt back stand angles the AC-33 towards your eardrums

The Roland AC-33 is billed as the first battery powered acoustic amplifier, but it's supplied with a power adaptor if you don't fancy splashing out on a load of AAs. It's also packing a bunch of useful features including reverb and chorus, anti-feedback circuitry and a phrase loop with a whopping 40 seconds of recording time.

The rugged AC-33 is the only stereo amp in this Group Test. The twin speakers pump out 30 watts (15 + 15 watts) when the



amp is connected to the mains and 20 watts (10 + 10 watts) when it's loaded with eight AA size batteries. The stereo spec really makes sense when you switch on the chorus. You suddenly get this lush sounding

shimmer that the other amps can't quite compete with.

The phrase loop is a blast. You can record yourself playing a riff or chord sequence for 40 seconds, then overdub some lead licks. Plug in your vocal microphone and the AC-33 becomes a seriously useful performance tool.

Conclusion: Thanks to the battery power option, the AC-33 will most likely prove itself irresistible to buskers. It handles intimate gigs but the

modest output means you'll have to run it into a PA at bigger shows, although there are 60 and 90-watt models available. Depending on your playing style, the loop function will either open up a new world of exciting musical possibilities or be nothing more than an intriguing novelty. We had a ball with it.

SUMMARY

For: Lush chorus sound, the loop
Against: A little underpowered



TG says: Streets ahead for buskers

Vox AGA70 £317

The acoustic sparkle

Speaker
Beware of ripping the pretty speaker cloth when you're gigging this amp



Tube Pre
One of the channels on the Vox AGA70 has a valve preamp

Build
Yes, the Vox is the heaviest amp here, but it's still portable

Vox, purveyor of electric guitar backline for The Beatles and others, has turned its attention to the needs of the acoustic player. Like the others here, the AGA70 is basically a compact PA system with two channels designed to handle a guitar and a mic. That said, it does have one unique feature...

One of its channels features a valve preamp. In electric guitar amps you'd expect that to add some sizzle to the



overdrive sound. In the case of the AGA70's Tube Pre channel, the little valve is charged with the task of providing some warmth. How much difference that single valve actually makes

is a question only your own eardrums can answer. All we can tell you is that the AGA70 pumps out a gorgeous tone that made our electro-acoustic sparkle.

Our only reservation about gigging the AGA70 is the thought of accidentally ripping that pretty speaker cloth. Be extra careful.

Conclusion: The Vox AGA70 uses good basic design to do one important job: make your guitar sound louder. Bells and whistles are kept to the

essentials and, while it's the heaviest amp here, it's still no spine-buster. The amp's 70-watt power output should be enough to accommodate most gigs but decibel fanatics may prefer the 150-watt AGA150 model, which still offers good value for money for its £528 asking price.

SUMMARY

For: Sparkling tone, plenty of volume
Against: Mind that speaker cloth



TG says: Another Vox that pops

"YOU'LL BE TAKEN ABACK BY THE SHEER AMOUNT OF TONE AND OUTPUT THE ZT LUNCHBOX ACOUSTIC OFFERS"

ACOUSTIC GIGGING AMPS ★ **GROUP TEST**

ZT Lunchbox Acoustic £389

Let's do lunch

Handle ■
We don't like the cheap-looking plastic handle. Sort it out, ZT!

Speaker ■
The Lunchbox is packing a single 6½-inch speaker that offers great tone



Power ■
This 200-watt amp is powerful yet still amazingly portable

At a glance

ZT Lunchbox Acoustic

TYPE: Acoustic amplifier
OUTPUT: 200 watts
SPEAKER: 1x 6½"
CONTROLS: Master volume, gain, bass, level, reverb, headphone/line out volume, phantom power
SOCKETS: Guitar in, headphone/line out, mic inputs, auxiliary input (1/8" stereo jack), effects loop
WEIGHT: 5.4kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 192 x 249 x 196mm
CONTACT: Aria UK 01483 238720
WEB: www.ztamplifiers.com

You won't find a tuna sandwich and a hard-boiled egg rolling about in this Lunchbox. Instead ZT has packed a smorgasbord of features into its toaster-size acoustic amplifier, including two channels, reverb, feedback buster, enough inputs and outputs to cover any performance or recording scenario, and a stonking 200 watts of output.

ZT has already shown its expertise with diminutive amplifiers with big voices. The



electric Lunchbox proved you don't need a huge amp to make an impact. That said, you'll still be taken aback by the sheer amount of output and tone that the Acoustic version delivers. Plugging in, the tone has a digital

quality to it – almost like hearing your guitar played back to you on CD – and there's some serious twang in the lower end. In fact, only the Vox AGA70 came close to matching it. There's enough output for small gigs but you have the option of running the ZT through an extension speaker if you start pulling bigger crowds.

Conclusion: The ZT Lunchbox Acoustic wins the top prize because it's a brilliant concept that has been executed well. Clearly someone has put a lot

of thought into the specification. The cheap plastic handle lets the side down a tad, but it's no deal-breaker and the amp excels in every other way possible. There's bags of headroom and excellent bass response on offer. It's amazing that what at first glance looks like a snack is actually a tonal feast. Yummy!

SUMMARY

For: Portability, tone, awesome spec
Against: That plastic handle!

★★★★★

TG says: Check full of tasty treats

Fishman Loudbox Mini £449

Angling for your dosh

Cabinet ■
We like the angled cab that points the speaker toward you



Controls ■
Like the other amps, the Mini has onboard chorus and reverb effects

Speaker ■
The Mini is the only amp in this test with a top end enhancing tweeter

At a glance

Fishman Loudbox Mini

TYPE: Acoustic amplifier
OUTPUT: 60 watts
SPEAKER: 1 x 6½" woofer, 1x 1" tweeter
CONTROLS: Instrument channel: low, mid, high, reverb, chorus; microphone channel: low and high, reverb; master volume, feedback phase switch
SOCKETS: Guitar input, mic input, aux in, DI out
WEIGHT: 8.9kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 305 x 349 x 247mm
CONTACT: John Hornby Skewes 01132 865 381
WEB: www.fishman.com

Well known among guitarists for its acoustic pickups, Fishman should know a bit about acoustic amps, too. The new Loudbox Mini backs that up with little touches including an angled cab that point the speakers to your ears. The simple control layout is perfect for guitarists who don't want to spend too much time finding a good tone.

There are two speakers: a six-and-a-half inch woofer and a



one-inch tweeter. We're so used to seeing tweeters in acoustic amps, we were surprised the Fishman is the only model here with one. The tweeter adds some top end sparkle to the

tone. Sure enough, plugging in produces a well balanced tone with some beef from the lower strings and a bit of sizzle in the top end. The Loudbox Mini works great for fingerstyle guitar, too. Although we prefer the bass response from the ZT, it's tough to imagine an acoustic player who couldn't make the Fishman work for them.

Conclusion: The angled cabinet and tweeter of this no-frills gigging amp indicate

a manufacturer that really understands what an acoustic guitarist is looking for. While the tone on offer is well delivered, it didn't stop us thinking about the ZT. Still, if you don't need all the goodies the Lunchbox Acoustic is packing, the Loudbox Mini should be high up on your 'must try' list.

SUMMARY

For: Simple design, angled cabinet
Against: Not as inspiring as some

★★★★★

TG says: Nothing fishy going on here