

BASS

PLAYER

**NEW
AMPS &
CABS** FROM
TRACE ELLIOT
ACME SOUND
EDEN

dub

REGGAE

GO DEEP WITH
FAMILY MAN BARRETT
ROBBIE SHAKESPEARE
FLABBA HOLT
BILL LASWELL & JAH WOBBLE

THE VERVE PIPE
DARRYL JONES
GARY KARR

MODULUS+SWR
\$6,148
GIVEAWAY
LAST
CHANCE!

NOVEMBER 1996

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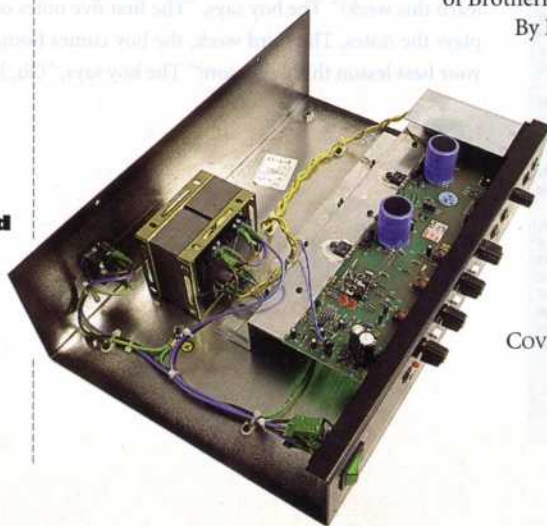


On The Cover: Dub Bass

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From Family Man Barrett to Flabba Holt, reggae bassists have created lines that support some of the most heavy and hypnotic music on record. Plus: A discography of crucial dub discs. By Bill Murphy
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The bassist/music mogul loves to bust stylistic barriers, but the subsonic pulse of dub bass is always his foundation. By James Rotondi
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They sure *look* simple—but capturing that heavy-duty, trance-like vibe is a highly rewarding challenge. By Gregory Isola

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It seems as if the entire history of classical bass has culminated with Karr, one of the most successful bass soloists alive. Plus: Gary's tips on getting started with a bow. By Timothy L. Stinson
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Is there something in the water? Philadelphia bassists Gerald Veasley, Charles Fambrough, and Tyrone Brown try to explain why the City of Brotherly Love has turned out so many bass greats. By Bill Milkowski



32 **Modulus + SWR Giveaway**

Last chance to win a Modulus Quantum 5 Sweetspot bass, an SWR Super Redhead combo amp, and an SWR Goliath Jr. III 2x10 cabinet—total value \$6,148!

COVER INSET PHOTOS: PETER SIMON

Product Profiles

Trace Elliot *continued*

BRIGHT switch is a bit too subtle for our tastes; its effect is just barely noticeable when you slap or strum high-register chords. The TREBLE knob, meanwhile, is plenty effective

Trace Elliot Commando

List price: \$599

1 2 3 4 5

Construction: ■■■■■

Electronics: ■■■■■

Sound: ■■■■■

Ease of use: ■■■■■

Value: ■■■■■

Bottom Line: The green monster in a little package.

for adding crisp highs without getting harsh.

How about that Commando 15? Not surprisingly, the larger speaker produces more floor-shaking bottom and a greater depth of tone. We found the 15's DEEP switch far more effective and its BASS knob truer; the lows on the smaller amp tend to get cardboardy at higher BASS settings. And despite the speaker's size, the 15 has a remarkably similar top end to the smaller amp's. However, we couldn't bear to set the 15's TREBLE knob past about 2 o'clock when slapping or strumming; the tone just got too harsh and brittle. But with just a touch of high end, some bass boost, and a little scoop in the mids, the



No rat's nest here—this amp's interior is super clean.

Commando 15 produces a very pleasing slap tone indeed. It really makes an argument for the combo amp as a viable alternative to bigger systems—although, realistically, there's just so much 100 watts can do in any configuration. As a result, both of these amps are pretty much relegated to practice and small-band situations. (Try finding any combo that can do battle with a Marshall stack!)

If you look at other combo amps,

you'll find nifty features like tuner-out jacks, tape inputs, and headphone jacks, and sure—they'd be nice to see on the Commando. But Trace Elliot wisely chose to concentrate on an amp's most important feature—tone. The company's engineers set out to put that high-end British sound into a small, lower-priced combo, and we think they've succeeded very nicely. Hear, hear!

DISTRIBUTOR'S ADDRESS

Box 507
Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 509-8888

Acme Sound Low B-2 and B-4 Enclosures

By Scott Malandrone

"If you're a 5-string player, you can now fully realize the potential of your instrument thanks to a

speaker with incredible speed and tremendous power handling. No longer will you have to forsake your lowest half-octave for the convenience of a compact enclosure. Nor will you need to carry a second, larger cabinet to produce low-frequency fundamentals that you can feel as well as hear."

Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Can you get big low-B tones from a cabinet as small as a 2x10? Acme Sound's Low B cabinets are intended to do just that: cleanly reproduce the fundamental of a B string. "These speakers are

designed to be very neutral-sounding," says Andy Lewis, designer of the Low B system. "They won't add a 'tone' or 'character' of its own to the signal."

There are two main ingredients in Acme's tone recipe. The first is a custom 3-way speaker system. Both enclosures use special 10" woofers designed to have a lower resonance (frequency), a deeper voice coil (for less distortion in the lows), and a longer excursion (amount of back-and-forth movement) than standard 10s. However, since these speakers are wound to go low, the trade-off is a dip in upper-midrange response.

To counteract this, Acme uses

a special 5" midrange driver that fills in the missing upper-mid details. (Another disadvantage is the amount of power required to drive the 10s. More on this later.) Further clarity in the highs is provided by a

ACME B-2/B-4 CABINETS

Made in: U.S.A.

Direct price: B-2, \$395;
B-4, \$575

Warranty: Two-year limited

Type: B-2, rear ported;
B-4, front and rear ported

Power rating: B-2, 350 watts
RMS @ 4Ω; B-4, 700 watts RMS @
8Ω

Frequency response: ±3dB @
41Hz–22kHz (–6dB @ 31Hz)

Crossover frequencies: 1kHz
and 9kHz

Sensitivity: B-2, 93dB SPL @
1W1M; B-4, 96dB SPL @ 1W1M

Speakers: Two (B-2) or four
(B-4) 175-watt custom Eminence
10s; one 50-watt Sammi 5, one
ferro-fluid-cooled 50-watt Audax
high-frequency driver

Rear panel: Two ¼" parallel-
input jacks; midrange attenuator
(∞–0dB); high-frequency attenuator
(∞–0dB)

Dimensions: B-2, 23" x 15¼" x
16½"; B-4, 26½" x 23" x 16½"

Box material: 7-ply ¾" birch
Weight: B-2, 49 lbs; B-4, 76 lbs



Product Profiles



Contents under pressure: A special system of shimmed braces pushes out on the sides of the box. The result? Cleaner, deeper bass response.

shallow-horn tweeter. When these components are combined via a rugged crossover, this full-range system produces bass down to 31Hz (the fundamental of the open B string) and highs up to 22kHz.

The second ingredient is a specially built Thiele-Small-aligned enclosure. By taking advantage of the "stressed panel" construction

technique used in building aircraft, the cabinets have a very high stiffness-to-weight factor. (See photo, above.) Here's how this works: The cabinet is built from birch plywood that's held together with glue and screws. Then, braces of 2" x 2" pine are placed inside the box at strategic points and small wedges of wood are hammered between the ends of

the braces and the inner walls. This means the braces are actually pushing out on the inside of the shell. Why do this? "Stressing increases the stiffness of the panels so they won't resonate," says Lewis. "Basically, you want the resonant frequency of the enclosure to be as high as possible so it won't interfere with the bass response of the woofers. If you look at the sides of enclosures, you can actually see the panels bowing out in the middle from the internal pressure."

Stressed-panel construction not only has structural and sonic benefits, it keeps the enclosures light and portable. Most 4x10s use heavier plywood to produce the same level of stiffness, and they can be a bear to lift. But it's easy to carry an Acme box, thanks to their light weight and perfectly placed handles (high and towards the front). These small, recessed handles may not be the most comfortable we've felt, but there's a reason for that, too. "Cut-

ting big holes in the sides of the box for large handles lowers the resonant frequency of the enclosure," says Lewis. "Ultimately, the best handles are no handles at all."

Do the Low B's perform as promised? To test their limits, we set up both cabinets in our Soundlab and connected them to a Demeter VTBP-201 tube preamp and Hafner Pro 5000 power amp. Our array of test basses included two 35"-scale 5-strings: a Modulus Sweetspot Custom SPi and a Lakland Deluxe 5. Other testing was performed in a live situation with a Gallien-Krueger 2000RB (1,000 RMS bridged mono) and an Eden WT-400 Traveler Plus head. We were especially skeptical about the 2x10, but this little guy filled the room with punchy, balanced bass all the way down to B. Witnesses were amazed that a 2x10 could put out so much clean low end. ("It sounds three times its size," said one listener.) The 4x10 was especially

The BASS BOOK

A COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF BASS GUITARS

by Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse



"BASS at the BASE"

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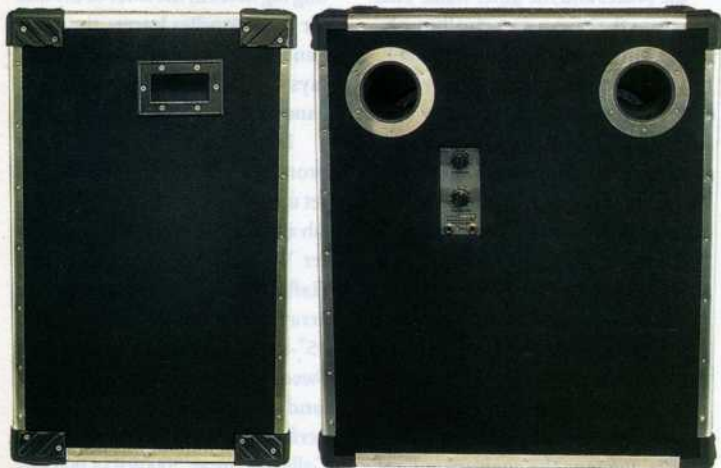
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Clearwater, FL 34619

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Sarasota, FL 34243

visit us on the world-wide web at <http://www.tbred-music.com/network>

Product Profiles



Two 3"-wide ports extend 12" into the rear of the enclosures. The 4x10 has an additional port located in the middle of the front panel. All of the edges and port openings are wrapped in 1/32" steel for protection.

Acme Sound *continued*

beefy; since the mids are handled by a separate driver, they speak with a more robust quality than is heard with most two-way cabinets. They also disperse much more smoothly. Overall, the Acmes are very warm-sounding boxes without the usual spikes in the midrange and top end. The 2x10 is fat enough for small- to medium-sized gigs (a pair in stereo would be a great setup), while the 4x10 offers more volume.

These cabinets are an acquired taste, though. If you're used to hearing your bass with lots of speaker coloration, you may find them a bit soft-sounding, even with the mid and high attenuators cranked. Rock and metal players who play with a pick, for instance, may miss the upper-end aggressiveness of "modern" 4x10 boxes. But jazz, fusion, and funk players will love the Acmes for their fast-and-flawless sound. R&B, country, and reggae players will also dig their round and tubey tone. (A vintage P-Bass sounded great through the 4x10—perfect for blues.)

These cabinets do have a healthy appetite for power, though. We found we had to set the volume controls at higher-than-normal settings, and the power amps tended to clip very easily. The 4x10 ate every last drop of our Hafler's bridged-mono 900 watts. Even at this power level,

the amp clipped with certain playing styles, such as slapping. Any distortion in the preamp or power amp will show up as nasty farting in these speakers—they're not very forgiving. "As a general rule," says Acme, "when distortion is heard from these speakers, it will be eliminated by increasing amplifier power. This is the unfortunate price we pay for a compact enclosure with extended bass." Acme recommends an amplifier with at least 200 watts RMS of power, although we'd suggest at least 350 watts (or more) for maximum headroom. In fact, the more power you apply to the speakers, the punchier they are. (The 4x10 handled the G-K's 1,000 watts with ease!) Also, you have to rethink your approach to setting up your tone controls. It's best to experiment with the mid and high attenuators on the back of the cabinet, rather than crank up the controls on your amp or bass. In general, the less EQ with these cabinets the better, as they don't need the low-end boosting most cabinets require.

Want to try a Low B cabinet? Since the company sells only direct, you won't be able to test one in a store. However, Acme does offer a two-week, no-risk trial period. And at less than 600 bucks for the 4x10, it's hard to imagine a better deal on quality, well-built bass gear. (*Shh...* don't tell Andy his cabinets are underpriced!)



Acme cabinets are three-way systems; the highs and mids are adjustable on the crossover plate.

The Acme Low B-2 and B-4 enclosures do require gobs of power for peak performance, but the end result is a rock-solid bottom end that will drive just about any band. And once you get used to hearing the true voice of your bass, you may never go back to your old cabinets again.

MANUFACTURER'S ADDRESS

Box 2556
Englewood, CO 80150
(800) 226-3583

Acme Sound Low B-2 2x10 Direct price: \$395

	1	2	3	4	5
Construction:	■	■	■	■	■
Components:	■	■	■	■	■
Portability:	■	■	■	■	■
Sound:	■	■	■	■	■
Value:	■	■	■	■	■

Bottom Line: A 2x10 that thinks it's a 4x10.

Acme Sound Low B-4 4x10 Direct price: \$575

	1	2	3	4	5
Construction:	■	■	■	■	■
Components:	■	■	■	■	■
Portability:	■	■	■	■	■
Sound:	■	■	■	■	■
Value:	■	■	■	■	■

Bottom Line: Balanced tones down to B. Just make sure you've got enough horsepower to drive it.

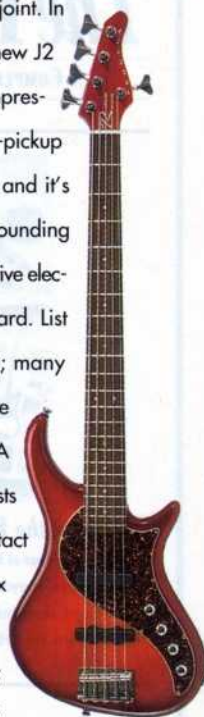
Gear Update: Pedulla Rapture Bass 5

Originally reviewed: July/August '95

Jazz Bass fanatics will love Pedulla's Rapture Bass J2 5-string. Why? Because it has one of the punchiest B strings around, complete with the throaty midrange of a good Jazz Bass. (Subterranean Jaco, anyone?)

The J2's modern-looking body is carved from soft Eastern maple, and its bolt-on hard-maple neck is topped with a 22-fret rosewood fingerboard. Hum-free sound is provided by two special-design Bartolini J-style pickups with a Bartolini NTBT active pre-amp; controls include master volume, blend, bass, and treble. The construction quality is impeccable: perfect fretwork, a crystal-clear finish, and a firm neck joint. In

a nutshell? The new J2 is every bit as impressive as the single-pickup Rapture Bass 5, and it's one of the best-sounding J-style 5's with active electronics we've heard. List price is \$1,995; many finish options are available. A 4-string version lists for \$1,795. Contact Pedulla at Box 226, Rockland, MA 02370; (617) 871-0073.



—Scott Malandrone