

MEGADETH • SMASHING PUMPKINS • AGAINST ME! • PORCUPINE TREE

BASS PLAYER

MUSIC!

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS
**'LISTEN TO
THE MUSIC'**

MARCUS MILLER WITH
LUTHER VANDROSS
**'NEVER TOO
MUCH'**

ELVIS COSTELLO &
THE ATTRACTIONS
'PUMP IT UP'

DIG DEEPER

20 YEARS AFTER

JACO

DECONSTRUCTING 'HAVONA'

HIS GREATEST BASS PERFORMANCE

LEE ROCKER

A STRAY CAT'S NEW STRUT

JONAS HELLBORG

TONE ZEALOT

DOOBIE BROTHERS

TIRAN PORTER

SHRUNKEN HEADS!

3 POWERFUL BASS AMPS UNDER 5 POUNDS
EA iAMP MICRO-300 • MARKBASS F1 • EDEN WTX-260
PLUS! NEW ESP BASSES
SEYMOUR DUNCAN PARANORMAL BASS DI

HOW TO REALLY LOCK WITH THE DRUMS

PAGE 90

\$5.99 U.S. \$7.99 CAN.



A MUSIC PLAYER PUBLICATION | SEPTEMBER 2007

WWW.BASSPLAYER.COM

SOUNDRoom

LIGHTWEIGHT AMPS • SEYMOUR DUNCAN • ESP • DEAN MARKLEY • NEW GEAR

Euphonic Audio iAmp Micro-300 Markbass F1 & Eden WTX-260

BY JONATHAN HERRERA



BEING A RELATIVELY SPRING-Y CHICKEN who spends a lot of time with older folks, I'm often tinged with mild regret when friends and relatives talk about significant historical moments I missed. Whether it's my grandfather remembering the moment when everything was suddenly made of plastic, or a bass buddy describing the transformative experience of his first Weather Report show, I occasionally feel like the precocious kid peering through the banister at his parents' smoky cocktail party. So happily for me, I'm around for one of those watershed moments in bass—a decisive point demarcating a wholesale change in the way bass amps are designed.

The big deal: Two technologies, switching power amps (Class D or, rarely, Class T) and switch-mode power supplies (SMPS), are revolutionizing bass amps, with blatantly obvious results. Take, for example, the Euphonic Audio iAmp Micro-300, Markbass F1, and Eden WTX-260. Combined, they weigh less than most con-

ventional bass heads, and on their own each is laughably light—under five pounds. The weight savings are due mostly to their lack of a clunky iron-filled linear power transformer, a consequence of the high operating frequency of an SMPS. Class D power amps also help peel off pounds: Their exceptional efficiency means the necessary components are smaller and need less heat-sinking than the (for now) more conventional Class AB power amps. When a SMPS and a Class D amp are combined in a bass head, you end up with ridiculous lightness, as Eden's David Nordschow attests: "We ended up using a steel chassis for the WTX just to get enough weight so that the speaker cables wouldn't pull it off a cabinet."

The weight benefits are inarguable—but you're saying, "it's the sound, stupid," so we snagged three of the hippest, lightest, um, high-techiest heads, slipped them into our man-purses, and hit some gigs.

SOUNDRoom POLICY

We test products in real-world environments, evaluating them with regard to price and the manufacturer's design intent. Advertising does not influence our product coverage. We invite manufacturers to fact-check product reviews prior to publication, and we print dissenting opinions when applicable. Street prices are approximate.

MARKBASS F1

List \$1,419

Street \$849

Pros Syrupy, juicy midrange and smooth top; louder than one might think; well-voiced EQ

Cons No MUTE switch

Bottom Line A light head that sounds big for its britches.

Contact

416-763-1493

www.markbass.it

TECH SPECS: F1

Power rating 300 watts RMS into 8 Ω ; 500 watts RMS into 4 Ω minimum load

Input impedance 500k Ω

Tone controls LOW: ± 16 dB @ 40Hz; LOW MID: ± 16 dB @ 360Hz; HIGH MID: ± 16 dB @ 800Hz; HIGH: ± 16 dB @ 10kHz

VFR filter Variable pre-shape filter, cut @ 380Hz

VLE filter Vintage loudspeaker emulator, cut @ 250Hz-20kHz

XLR or output Differential op-amp driven with GROUND LEFT switch

Power amp topology Class D

Weight 4 lbs, 8 oz

Options Padded shoulder bag, price TBD; rack kit, price TBD

MARKBASS F1

The F1 takes a slightly different design approach than the other two heads here, stuffing itself into a relatively wide single-rackspace chassis. It feels rugged and dense; Markbass didn't skimp on components. The front panel is a touch cluttered, but it's nothing that one couldn't adapt to quickly. The rear panel offers two Speakon outputs, an XLR balanced output with ground lift, and a parallel effect loop. Even though the head is a bit wide, it's exceptionally portable—I was able to stuff it into a gig bag (the ultimate measure of these tiny amps).

The preamp is straightforward, with the exception of Markbass's proprietary VLE and VLF circuits. VLE (Vintage Loudspeaker Emulator) is a variable lowpass filter and EQ contour—as it's turned up, highs are reduced and low mids boosted to emulate the huskier sound of vintage gear. I thought of it as the amp equivalent of a passive bass's tone knob. The VLF is a midrange cut, best for achieving that scoopy

slap sound. Otherwise, the Markbass's no-frills tone shaping is predictable and controlled. One notable absence is a MUTE switch—this should be standard on every head by now.

Two qualities seemed to define the Markbass's sound on gigs and in rehearsals. First, it has a buttery-sounding preamp, with toothsome mids and a smooth, syrupy top. That's not to say it's a slow responder; rather it delivers sweet, colorful tone with booty-thwacking immediacy. Second, and perhaps more important, it's loud. Delivering 500 watts into 4 ohms, it doesn't seem like a lightweight, single-rackspace head at all. It was plenty loud for decent-size gigs. I found it to be particularly strong at quick techniques, like uptempo fingerstyle, that played to its midrange beauty and fast response.