

Phil Jones Bass Super Flightcase BG-300 amp

By Ed Friedland

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The original Phil Jones Bass Flightcase was a significant entrant in the micro-amp wars thanks to its high power-to-weight ratio and audiophile-quality tone. The diminutive portable quickly gained fans with upright bassists and among electric bassists that wanted high fidelity at low volume. But many denizens of the deep called out for more volume, more bottom and more power, all without more weight. Apparently, the folks at PJB have heard the call, and they have responded: Super Flightcase to the rescue!

FEATURES

The most obvious difference between the Super Flightcase BG-300 and the original Flightcase BG-150 is the speaker configuration. The original has two lightweight five-inch neodymium drivers pointed toward the audience and two facing straight up. The Super adds two more forward-facing speakers, which creates a full, “surround-sound” tone that radiates throughout the stage rather than being directional. The preamp is the same as in the BG-150, with an active/passive toggle that changes the input impedance from 4.7 megohm in Passive mode to 50kHz in Active, a feature that optimizes the tone of passive, active or piezo pickups.

A 250-watt Class A/B amp with a Switch Mode Power Supply (SMPS) drives the BG-300. Phil Jones states that a Class A/B amp gives a truer representation of the bass waveform, and the higher-frequency operation of the switching power supply increases its efficiency. The SMPS design forgoes the heavy transformer of conventional amps and thus is critical in keeping the amp’s weight at a very manageable 33 pounds.

The five-band EQ provides a wide spectrum of control that enables you to tune in a variety of useful bass sounds. As there is no tweeter in this rig, the 12kHz treble control is set to bring out the sparkle for a killer slap tone, while the low frequencies—Lo-Bass, @50Hz, and Hi-Bass, @160Hz—allow you to tune the bottom for maximum girth with minimal mud. The two bands of midrange—Lo-Mid, @630Hz, and Hi-Mid, @2.5kHz—provide fine control over presence and detail. With 18dB of boost and cut on all bands, the BG-300 is an extremely flexible tone shaper.

The optical limiter can be bypassed or adjusted with its own level control to provide a degree of safety when pushing the amp. Unlike many built-in limiting circuits, the PJB manages the level without squashing the life out of the attack. An effect loop, line out, headphone out, tuner out and a balanced DI with ground lift round out the BG-300’s feature set.

PERFORMANCE

Like the BG-150, the 300 is designed to work in conjunction with an acoustic environment. Three floor-level ports help couple the rig to the stage—which is, in part, how this quart-sized box achieves gallon-sized low end. The key to unlocking the amp’s maximum potential is to find the optimal distance off the stage’s back wall. By using the floor and walls you gain bottom that the amp itself won’t provide, but the upward facing speakers prevent the sound from being “absorbed” by the room.

While the increase in power and additional speaker coverage improve the 300’s high-volume capabilities, it’s obvious that this amp is not destined to be a big hit with the death metal crowd. Still, it performed admirably with a four-piece band with drums and electric guitar. Moving the amp around the stage, I was able to find the sweet spot that produced the most low end without losing clarity, and the cabinet handled the low B string without wheezing.

Employed with a gut-stringed upright bass on a roots/country gig, the BG-300 had plenty of naturally punchy bottom. Cranking the treble control brought out enough high end from my relatively dark-sounding Realist pickup to help the rockabilly slap technique cut through. Maxing the highs to that level is often accompanied by a lot of hiss, but the BG-300 is remarkably quiet, even when boosted to the extreme.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While this upgraded model has way more guts than its predecessor, it still relies on the acoustic environment to give you optimal performance. It might not be the best choice for an outdoor gig where you can’t take advantage of a back wall, or the resonance of a wooden stage. But in ideal conditions, the BG-300 dishes out delicious, organic beef, with plenty to go around.



Phil Jones Bass Super Flightcase BG-300 amp

LIST PRICE: \$1,350.00

MANUFACTURER: Phil Jones Bass,
philjonesbass.com

Pro Natural tone; flexible EQ; lightweight

Con Not well-suited to outdoor gigs