



TESTING

# B-52 AT-100 & AT-412A

100W ALL-TUBE HEAD WITH TRI-MODE RECTIFIER & QUAD BOX

An attractively priced tri-mode head with more grunt than 100 Fred Schneiders

\$2500



**L**AST issue we told you all about the three-channel B-52 AT-212 100W combo from the B-52 Stealth Series. Now we've got another killer tone machine with power, grunt and flexibility that rivals far less versatile amps in far higher price brackets. When the B-52 AT-100 tri-mode head and matching 412A slant-front cabinet turned up in the office, we could tell the rig was going to be a beast just from the sheer size of the boxes. The kilos lost lugging the thing into my house were another indicator that it was packing some serious muscle within – even the cab was packing a surprising amount of weight, and that's little more than speakers and wood. Thank god we invented the wheel before the quad box. It was all worth it though, 10 times over. One look at the brushed-metal faceplate and chunky, heavy-duty chrome knobs tells us two things: a) there's no secret as to which popular amp this triple-rectifying animal is paying homage to; and b) this amp wears its attitude on its sleeve.

## They Said, "Release Complete Control"

Looking at the front panel of the AT-100, there's a multitude of settings just waiting to be dialled in. First you've got the master section, with controls for Reverb, Low Res (low-end resonance – dialling it in fattens up your bass frequencies for a warm, beautifully textured clean signal) and Volume. The clean section, which incidentally delivers one of the cleanest tones we've heard at extreme volume, contains a Volume control, Brightness switch and three-band EQ, while the right half of the panel is devoted to overdrive, with two footswitchable (the included footswitch engages gain, channel, reverb and effects loop) gain channels sharing a Contour control (assignable) for tweaking those precious mids and a three-band EQ, plus each has separate Gain and Volume dials. Being able to dial in two distinct overdrive flavours comes in extremely handy, but it's certainly not the limits of the B-52's versatile ways.

Round the back, there's a ground lift switch to remove hum and the all-important rectifier dial for toggling between solid-state, Class A and Class A/B operation modes, as well as a three-way impedance toggle, line out with level control, and the effects loop, with send and return level controls. There may have been an espresso maker and milk frother as well, but when I tried to make a cuppa, it just programmed my VCR. At least with the variable transformer I'll have no trouble with voltage on my next world stadium tour.

## Born To Boogie

Upon plugging in the AT-100 and giving my guitar a strum, the experience was something akin to that scene in *Back To The Future* when Marty McFly plugs into Doc's souped up wall of speakers and gets flung back into the wall behind him, buried in nerdy junk. Out of respect for my neighbours,

I refrained from cranking it to 10, even though the sight of all those glowing tubes made the idea somewhat tempting. Volume is definitely not an issue. Tone isn't either – in fact, tonal flexibility is this amp's strong point, especially through the four 120W B-52 custom speakers in the quad. Given the setting choices available, you'll likely spend hours exploring the possibilities. As I've stated, the clean channel is super-clear - sweet, mellow and sparkling with the warmth of four Sovtec 6L6 power tubes, four 12AX7 pre-amp tubes, and then another four for the rectifier (5AR4), phase inverter (12AX7), reverb (12AT7) and effects loop (12AX7), although given the amp's capabilities, effects were the last thing on my mind.

The overdrive section is superb. In Class A/B mode, I couldn't believe how simple it was jumping between the usual suspects. Vintage, searing overdriven blues shifts all the way to blistering AC/DC, and when gain is invited to the party, the metal world's your oyster, from chunky grunt to squealing sustain and tight harmonics, although crank it to an extreme, thrashy level of distortion and you're going to get a bit of unwanted noise. Still, I felt no compulsion to pull out my chunky little Marshall Guv'nor pedal.

During our time with this boisterous little lady, I became addicted to the clean blues tone, as well as a fuzzy, brutal overdriven vintage garage rock sound that took me well into an MC5 trance for about half an hour (sorry to the neighbours for that one, but it was Saturday arvo).

For straighter rock tones, the Class A rectifier setting was like gold, providing some beautiful vintage breadth to the output. It's not going to give you instant classic Fender or AC30 at the twist of a dial, but rather, like the amp it takes its inspiration from, provides an equally valuable in-between sound.

## The Bottom Line

I'm seriously going to hate giving this amplifier back. I'm in love with it, and would relish a quick session in a dank rehearsal room any day of the week. I know they say such indulgences will send you deaf, but I really can't help myself. Still, it'd be nice to see some side handles on the head.

Given the wealth of features available these days in well-built, well-priced amps such as the B-52s (and they've only been doing guitar amps for a couple of years), I'm giving serious thought to jumping in the DeLorean to see just how nuts things are five years from now. Until then, I'll be in the love shack with the B-52.

Karl Mayerhofer

**SPECS**

- Made USA
- Price \$2500 (cabinet \$1350)
- Features
  - ◆ All-tube signal path
  - ◆ Tri-mode rectifier: tube - Class A or AB; solid-state - Class AB
  - ◆ Overdrive Channel: Gain 1 and Gain 2, each with independent master volume, three-band EQ, assignable contour control
  - ◆ Clean Channel: master volume, three-band EQ and Bright switch
  - ◆ Global Controls: Volume, Low-Res (resonance) and Reverb
  - ◆ Effects loop with level controls (footswitchable)
  - ◆ Line out with level control
  - ◆ Selectable 4/8/16 Ohms
  - ◆ External speaker jacks
  - ◆ 4-position footswitch: Channel, Gain, Reverb and Effects Loop
  - ◆ Ground lift switch
- Dimensions 27" x 11" x 11"
- Weight 53lbs

**CONTACT**  
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**WHAT WE RECKON**

**PROS**

- ▲ Endless configuration options
- ▲ It's US-made, has a selectable rectifier and is cheaper than its peers
- ▲ Powerful enough for any venue

**CONS**

- ▼ Side handles wouldn't go astray
- ▼ Some static at extreme distortion levels

