

SOUNDCHECK TESTING 1...2...3...

BOMBS AWAY!

B-52 Professional AT-100 head and AT-412 cabinet

By **Eric Kirkland**

TWO YEARS AGO, the family-owned B-52 Professional audio company shocked the guitar community with its LG-100A, an inexpensive amp that redefined the dynamic and tonal range associated with solid-state circuitry. Since then, the company has sold more than 10,000 units of the amp, a remarkable feat.

For their follow-up, the devious minds at B-52 convened a panel of famous amp designers and charged them with building the company's flagship amplifier. The result is the all-tube, three-channel AT-100. How good is it? Let's just say that with its feature range and impossibly low price, the AT-100 may become the new "must-have" amp for guitarists everywhere.

Features and Build

With its black vinyl exterior and brushed-aluminum front panel, the AT-100 has an industrial, almost generic look. You wouldn't guess that this box is packed with the finest components. Four 5881 power tubes provide 100 watts of 6L6-style punch, with a softer and warmer character than the larger bottles possess. Seven 12AX7s drive the preamp, reverb and effect loop, while a lone 5AR4 rectifier tube rounds out the tone.

The front panel is divided, from left to right, into sections for the Master controls and the Clean and Overdrive channels. The Master section has controls for volume, reverb and low resonance, while the Clean channel has a bright switch, a volume control and a three-band EQ. The Overdrive's two channels share a trio of EQ knobs but benefit from separate gain and volume controls and a channel-assignable contour circuit that can radically revoice the midrange and add perceived gain.

Practical features abound on the AT-100's rear panel. They include an effect loop with send and return level controls, jacks for the footswitch, a line out and speaker outputs. Best of all is a three-way rectifier knob with options for solid-state, tube Class A and tube Class AB performance, giving players control over the amp's feel and power.

The AT-412A cabinet is ruggedly con-



structed from Baltic birch and loaded with four specially built 120-watt B-52 speakers. A stereo/mono switch extends the impedance and connection options. The supplied footboard switches the channels, reverb and effect loop.

Performance

I tested the AT-100 with a few of my favorite guitars, using Planet Waves guitar cables and a Klotz speaker interface. For the Clean channel, I pulled out my swamp ash Telecaster, which boasts a muscular Barden humbucker in the neck slot. The AT-100's tone wasn't quite vintage Fender, but the notes had

a warm and distinct ring I didn't expect from a channel-switching high-gain head. I flew through popped-string runs and hammered the low strings on my guitar, but the B-52 remained polite and kind to my ears.

Next, I fired riffs into the B-52's first Overdrive channel with my EMG-loaded Charvel and an early Eighties Les Paul. I was treated

to classic crunch tones and a righteous, sharp muted chunk, à la Green Day. With heinous metal tones as my goal, I turned to the second Overdrive channel and found it easily kicked out enough thrust to preclude the need for a distortion box. The tone was defined by brilliant saturation, tight lows, screaming sustain and a few chainsaw teeth that cut an aggressive path between the notes. The contour control is the secret weapon here, as it enables quick access to any midrange curve you might desire.

With each of the AT-100's channels, the reverb was clear and free of any warble or interrupting frequencies. In addition, the three rectifier options gave precise control over the amp's profile, from round and soft to bold and chiseled.

The Bottom Line

B-52's AT-100 boasts an all-tube three-channel design that cranks out high power. Designed by a team of industry geniuses

to deliver every style of music imaginable, the AT-100 gives guitarists custom-tuned tone at a production price. ■

PRO: Great boutique tones, smart design and features, low price

CON: Contour control is not footswitchable



KA-CHING!

LIST PRICES:

AT-100 head, \$1,399.00; AT-412, \$799.00

MANUFACTURER:

B-52 Professional, 3383 Gage Ave., Huntington Park, CA, 90255; (800) 344-4384; b-52guitar.com

AIR COMMAND

Avi El-Kiss, VP of B-52 Professional, briefs us on the AT-100's mission.

What was the goal of the AT-100's design?

Following the success of our solid-state LG-100A, we wanted the all-tube AT-100 to serve as the flagship to put B-52 on the high-end guitar amplification map. We spent time, money and effort on the manufacturing and design to provide a feature set and tone that can be found only in amplifiers costing twice as much, if not more.

What kind of music is this amp suited to?

Blues, country, metal, rock and

roll...there is no one musical genre that this amp serves. The Clean channel maintains clarity even at high volumes. Its three-band EQ and bright switch are very responsive, so you can dial in the exact tone you desire. The Distortion channel has two independent gains and volumes, with a shared three-band EQ. This, along with the assignable contour control, allows a player to make these channels sound radically different. And we designed the preamp so that, whether you use a \$99 or \$4,000 guitar, you'll get the sound you're after.

Why did B-52 build its own speakers for the AT-100?

We wanted a specific tone and had a hard time finding it with off-the-shelf speakers. The AT-100 covers so much tonal ground, from a loud and sweet clean tone to insane distortion, so we needed a speaker that could meet the amplifier's wide range of demands. We tried Vintage 30s, which are amazing speakers—we use them in other B-52 products—but in blind taste tests, guitar players of every genre overwhelmingly chose our cabinets for use with the AT-100. —E.K.