

Just another furry black bass combo? Nope. By applying some of their high-end specs to an affordable range, Ashdown has produced a virtually pro-level chunk of kit. Gareth Morgan is a believer...

RRP:
£399

Ashdown

MAG C115-300 Bass Combo

Eight years ago the Ashdown phoenix rose from the flames of the original Trace Elliot crew, and the company rapidly gained a reputation for high specs, high quality and justifiably high cost bass amplification. Getting the wonderful John Entwistle onboard (see *Bass Workshop*, *Guitar* 15/4) helped, and the endorsement of others such as U2's Adam Clayton soon followed. These guys were using the top-of-the-range ABM series, but Ashdown rapidly identified the value of entry-level, affordable units designed to attract the musician to the product just as Fender had (via Squier) some 20-odd years before. Thus, everyone gets the chance to sample Ashdown's wares via the budget-booming MAG series.

Firstly, let's examine some differences between the MAG and ABM series to see how cost-reduction is achieved. Instead of birch ply, 19mm chipboard is the material of choice here. If this sounds low-brow, the truth is it's just as solid, if a little heavier (although 28kg/61.7lbs is only 2kg heavier than the ABM equivalent, and certainly not excessive). Standing 581mm (22.9") high, 474mm (18.7") wide and 300mm (11.8") deep, the oblong box is dressed not in the ABM's sleek buffalo leather apparel but in black cloth.

In truth, some of us prefer furriness, and the protection is no less good. There's a single top-mounted plastic handle for lugging (as opposed to recessed, side-mounted grabbers); we're not dealing with excessive size or weight, so there's no practical disadvantage here. It's quite easy to simply pick up the MAG and either use the handle alone, grasp it close to your bosom or combine the two methods. What else? Well,

we've got plastic corners, which the MAG also stands on, versus metal corners and plastic feet. Draw your own conclusions.

A solid steel grille with a 'biker' logo in the top left-hand corner (top central on the ABM's) performs speaker protection duties. The speaker is the same 15" Ashdown Blue Line driver with porting provided by two plastic

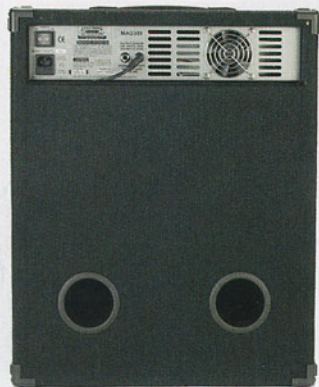
tubes situated at the back, along the bottom edge.

Other than the fact that the ABM front panel is powder blue compared to the MAG's off-white, we'll put comparison to one side at this point as the ABM series is nominally rated at higher power and efficiency levels and, to be fair, you're still getting mucho specs for minimum dinero.





Controls Input and output gain, nice EQ with fine-tunable mids, and sub-harmonics for deep growl



Ashdown was one of the first amp makers to waltz down Retro Styling Street, and they've kept the torch burning with the MAG: the quaint VU meter for input-level monitoring is a nice touch, and it's supplemented by the panel colour and over-sized rotary controls with unfussy stenciling.

From left to right you get an Input Gain with two input sockets beneath – High (presumably for passive basses) and Low (active). To the right of the VU meter sits a line of three black plastic buttons. The first (Deep, In/Out) gives 8dB of boost at 50Hz; Bright In/Out gives 10dB of boost at 10kHz; and the third one is self-explanatory – EQ In/Out.

Five dials in the middle of the panel deal with basic EQ: Bass provides 15dB of cut/boost at 100Hz, Middle gives the same cut/boost at 660Hz and Treble operates similarly at 7kHz. In between the main controls, two secondary dials provide the same level of cut or boost at 220Hz (low-mid) and 1.6kHz (high-mid), for tighter control of your mids.

Adjacent to the EQ section lurks the Sub-Harmonics In/Out switch and Level control, which, like the Boss OC-2 Octave pedal, adds growl an octave below your note. For Level control read 'blend', and note that the amount of bass EQ you're using affects how this works – too much boost and you're gonna get distortion!

This is a fantastic piece of kit. It's the best budget combo I've come across

An FX Send and Return and Tuner/Line Out (the Line Out producing a signal suitable for slaving from) complete the bottom right-hand side. All that's left to mention are the XLR D.I. Out socket (post EQ) and Output (master volume) control. Power-supply socket and On/Off switch are housed on the back panel, as are two Speaker Out sockets, one for the internal speaker and one for an extension cab. Various blubs, a cooling fan and air-circulation vents complete the picture.

SOUNDS

A word on the Sub-Harmonics (SH) dial: as we suspected, the SH works like an octave pedal so is probably better as an optional effect, albeit a high quality one. As with Octave, it breaks-up and/or exhibits a degree of latency below low C on a four-string bass. Useful at the right time... but not a sub-bass panacea.

Other than that, the MAG is a big box of power. Bypassing EQ reveals a basic system that – reassuringly – simply amplifies your natural fundamental sound, and Deep and Bright give around a third boost relative to the respective

FACTFILE

ASHDOWN MAG C115-300

Description: single channel, 307W 1x15" transistor combo. Ashdown Blue Line 15" speaker. 19mm chipboard cabinet with rear porting. Made in UK

Price: £399

Controls: input gain, bass, middle and treble controls with associated Low and High Mid controls at 220Hz and 1.6kHz respectively. Deep and Bright In/Out switches, EQ In/Out switch, Sub In/Out switch with level control, Output control. DI Out socket, Effects Send and Return sockets and Tuner/Line out socket

Range Options: combos: 300W 2x10" with tweeter (MAG C210T-300, £449), 300W 4x10" with tweeter (MAG C410T-300, £475). Extension cabs: 1x15" (MAG 115 Deep, £205), 2x10" with tweeter (MAG 210T Deep, £225), 4x10" with tweeter (MAG 410T Deep, £299)

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controls. This is almost as far as you need to go as the tone is rich, fat, smooth and defined across the whole range. Boost 220Hz a third for killer punch, or 1.6kHz for a wicked finger-funk sound – although anywhere near full boost with either is as horrible as you'd expect. We recklessly max'd-out the Treble and our reward was vicious bite and an ear-slicing slap tone without the extraneous hiss and click normally at home when Mr Tweeter enters the room. Try nudging Middle to 2 o'clock if you want brittleness, and the MAG starts snapping round your ankles. This is serious funk for the money.

If you want a smoother, retro-rock vibe, simply cut Middle to 10 o'clock: a silky sound for thudding eighth-notes and groove-playing of any description. You can also try prodding Deep and rolling Bass to 3 o'clock if you want to shift even more air. Careful, as too much adds unwanted distortion, but we're talking serious amounts of rolling thunder – and anybody of a sub-bass tendency would be proud of it.



VERDICT

You can take the price into account or simply ignore it: either way, this is a fantastic piece of kit. I'm not sure if you'll get a clean and true 307 watts out of it without the aid of an extension cab, but you get bags of rumble for your roubles. The sheer energy

in the tone is inspiring and the massive amounts of cut, bite and attack belie the lack of a horn and answer the question, 'Do I ever need one?' firmly in the negative. I'm even going to go as far as saying that this is the best budget priced combo I've come across.