

PJB M-500**List** \$1,395**Street** Same as list**Pros** Super-quick responsiveness; powerful; gobs of tone shaping**Cons** Slant-front design make the front-panel sensitive to damage; too-bright power light**PJB 24B & 8T****List** \$2,395 (24B); \$895 (8T)**Street** Same as list**Pros** Excellent full-range frequency response; high power handling**Cons** Extremely big and heavy; 8T designed for use only in conjunction with another PJB cabinet**Contact** (314) 814-3383 www.philjones-bass.com**METHODOLOGY****Soundroom** Modulus Quantum 5, Lakland Skyline Darryl Jones Signature, Line 6 Variax Bass 700, '76 Fender Jazz Bass, David King D Bass; Bergantino HT-322 2x10 + 1x12 cabinet, Aguilar GS 112 1x12 cabinet, Eden D-410XLT 4x10 cabinet**Gigs/rehearsals** F Bass BN5, '78 Fender Precision Bass, Fender American Standard Jazz Bass, Tobias Standard 5; Bergantino HT-322 2x10 + 1x12 cabinet, Epifani UL-210 2x10 cabinet

PHIL JONES BASS M-500, 24B & 8T

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR I FIND MYSELF AT THE NAMM show, a huge musical instrument convention held in Anaheim, Austin, and Indianapolis. It's disorienting, to say the least. As one part of my brain (the job part) mulls over the usual suspects' relentless stream of shiny new gear, another hemisphere clamors for bandwidth as the more eccentric, quirky, or downright cool new gear rises above the convention-floor sea level. When I first encountered Phil Jones Bass at Summer NAMM 2002 (then in Nashville), that half of the brain took over. Whether it was the enormous 813 tetrodes (basically, the biggest tubes you've ever seen) in his \$10,000 T-500 head or the sea of little silver-painted speakers in his cabs, it was immediately obvious Mr. Jones was up to some avant-garde bass amp engineering. A quick chat revealed why: Phil Jones was (and is, with his AAD brand) a big player in the audiophile speaker world, and those folks are nothing if not adventurous. The PJB no-compromise philosophy is well represented in the M-500 head and 8T/24B speaker system. The rig was designed for ultimate responsiveness, linear power handling, and high fidelity. Convenience concerns, like weight and size, never trumped these primary sonic objectives.

The PJB cabinets solely utilize 5" PJB Piranha drivers. A clear departure from the bigger-speaker-equals-fatter-tone approach of most manufacturers, the Piranha stems from Phil Jones's belief that smaller speakers are ideally suited to the fast transients, low-frequency fundamental, and colorful harmonic content of bass guitar. Like their namesake, the Piranhas find their strength in numbers. High-power strontium ferrite magnets and oversize voice coils make each driver sensitive and powerful; in combination, their surface area quickly matches that of conventional speaker configurations—for example, eight 5" drivers equals the speaker surface area of



a 2x10 cabinet. But opposed to the two voice-coil "motors" of a 2x10 cabinet, the eight voice-coil equipped PJB cab has more motor driving the equivalent surface area. The result? Speed, resistance to dynamics-squashing compression, high power handling, and phenomenally loud output. The downsides? All those speakers, and the box to fit them in, are no-joke heavy.

PJB designed the 8T and 24B cabs to function together as a big-gig system—their combined speaker area is equivalent to an 8x10 cab. The 16 Ω 8T is not designed for use on its own, but when combined with the 24B in parallel, the total nominal impedance is a just-right 4 Ω . But you'd better hope your big gigs come

SECOND OPINION

The M-500 head felt loud and responsive at a pair of rock rehearsals, but it seemed awfully heavy for the one-handed carry the top-mounted handle seems to suggest. Altogether, the rig moves an awesome amount of air and offers a rich, full-range sound, but since it's so cumbersome, I'd only consider using it for an installed location like a big church or theatre.

—BILL LEIGH



with roadies, because moving the two cabs and the head on your own is nearly impossible; combined, they weigh about 282 pounds. But if you're up to the task, so are the cabs. They're excellently constructed, thoroughly reinforced, and equipped with all the rugged road-worthy accouterments I dig, like skid plates, tough steel handles, and dent-resistant grilles. The duo combines for 3,200 watts of power handling, with molar-mashing flat response down to 25Hz.

The PJB M-500 head is not as left-field as the cabs, but it gave me the same feeling of overbuilt ingenuity. The sloped front panel is packed with unusually extensive EQ: three bands of defeatable semi-parametric and a 12-band graphic circuit. Signal-strength indicators bolster the big knurled INPUT LEVEL knob, and similar output-indicating LEDs augment the POWER OUTPUT knob. Everything was clearly labeled and efficiently laid

out. Exterior construction was superior, but for the graphic-EQ sliders: They were loosely attached and easily broken off. This wouldn't have been as problematic had the PJB not been designed so that the front-panel knobs are slanted and exposed. Removing the M-500 from its wood case was a cinch: I simply loosened the four chrome hex bolts on each side, and *voilà!* The head has a contiguous steel chassis, so it could be used away from the rack case—but it's not standard rack width, and the sloped front panel would make mounting tricky. Removing the top revealed an exceptionally high-quality interior, laced with reliable construction touches, like long-lasting 2% silver solder and well-braced and -placed printed circuit boards. The PJB's power supply—the amp component that ensures smooth, bountiful power delivery to the MOSFETs and other amplifying components—is particularly sweet. A 30-pound

TECH SPECS

Phil Jones Bass M-500

Power rating 280 watts RMS into 8Ω; 510 watts RMS into 4Ω; 720 watts RMS into 2Ω minimum load

Input impedance

Passive, 2MΩ; active, 100kΩ; line, 75kΩ

Tone controls

PARAMETRIC section: ±15dB @ 30Hz–200Hz; ±15dB @ 300Hz–2kHz; ±15dB @ 3kHz–15kHz; GRAPHIC section: ±15dB @ 30Hz, 40Hz, 60Hz, 100Hz, 180Hz, 340Hz, 660Hz, 1.3kHz, 2.6kHz, 5kHz, 10kHz, 15kHz

Other tone controls

Optical compressor with adjustable threshold, 3:1 ratio

XLR DI output

Differential op-amp driven with PRE/POST and GROUND LIFT switches

Power amp topology

Class AB, MOSFET

Output jacks

Two Neutrik Speakons

Weight

37 lbs

Phil Jones Bass 8T

Speakers Eight Phil Jones Bass Piranha 5" drivers

Impedance

16Ω

Frequency response

45Hz–15kHz

Power rating

800 watts RMS

Weight

73 lbs

Phil Jones Bass 24B

Speakers 24 Phil Jones Bass Piranha 5" drivers

Impedance

5.3Ω

Frequency response

25Hz–15kHz

Power rating

2,400 watts RMS

Weight

172 lbs

Made in

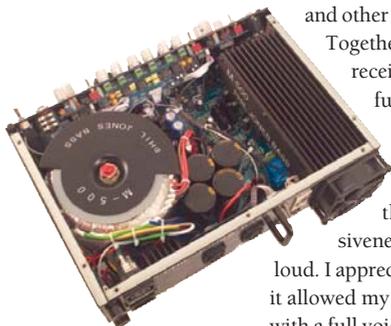
China

Warranty

M-500, two years limited; 24B and 8T, five years limited



PJB also makes high-quality, low-resistance speaker and instrument cable. The SS-4 Speakon cable (\$69 list) features PJB's own connectors, as does its entire cable line.



The M-500 as an exquisitely-designed model of space efficiency. Note the giant toroidal transformer on the left.

Phil Jones Bass continued

toroidal transformer and huge 40,000 μ F reservoir capacitors ensure constant voltage delivery for quick dynamic response. The consequence of the M-500's relatively enormous power supply is weight—the M-500 is no fun to schlep around.

THE FUN PART

On their own, with competitor's cabs for the M-500 and other heads for PJB cabs, the gear sounded good. Together, they kick butt. While an early model we received for testing had a few power-amp malfunctions, our second test M-500 performed as designed. It's a dry and scintillatingly powerful head. What it doesn't have in midrange color and funk-itude, it more than makes up for with strength, responsiveness, and high fidelity. Plus, it's just freakin' loud. I appreciated the high **PASSIVE** input impedance, as it allowed my vintage instruments to breathe and speak with a full voice, and the **ACTIVE** input had enough headroom for each active bass I tried. The optical compressor is one of the best I've heard built into a head, adding punch and presence to bridge-pickup fingerstyle and multi-pickup slap. The EQ, to me, was a bit too extensive, but it certainly did everything one could imagine,

particularly the thoughtfully voiced **GRAPHIC** circuit. The informative manual does provide insightful commentary on attacking the M-500's extensive tone-shaping features. Since I preferred the M-500's uncolored natural tone, I often used the bypass function for both EQs—I'm glad PJB included it. A few niggles: The EQ bypass switches made audible pops, and the blazing blue **POWER** lamp was far too bright onstage, causing some minor grumbling from a couple of club owners. The M-500 had a clean and consistent output from the **BALANCED LINE OUT** in my home studio; I was especially pleased with its low noise. The two-speed fan was quiet, but I wish it were defeatable for particularly noise-sensitive environments.

Mated to the M-500 head and other high-power heads, the 8T and 24B lived up to PJB's flamboyant claims of fidelity, power delivery, and excitement. They are among the punchiest cabinets I've used: Funky J-Bass-wielding fingerstylists will flip over the cabs' gut-slammng tone. Each test instrument's range was honestly communicated, with perhaps a hint of midrange emphasis. The cabs transitioned smoothly from the low to high registers, again with a small upper-mid hump. Even though the PJB cabs lack a conventional tweeter, they transmit high-frequency sparkle with honesty—perhaps more honesty than a horn-loaded design. There's a sense of congruity between treble-range sounds, like pops and harmonics, and lower-frequency parts, that is clearly



The M-500's front-panel features include a jack for an optional external volume pedal and an effect loop.



The M-500's rear panel includes an AC outlet, parallel pre-amp out jacks, and a full-featured balanced XLR output.

different from the more detached sound of woofer-plus-tweeter designs. With the M-500, the cabs were a joy and were capable of just silly amounts of volume and bass response. Cranking the head and digging into a B string was a shoe-rattling, earplug-grabbing delight.

The PJB rig has the tone, power, and looks of a seri-

ous large-scale rig. While the head had a couple of construction problems, the rig was ruggedly built from long-lasting components. All together, it's a pretty impractical tone-tower for the average working bassist, but the super motivated (or super successful) are well advised to hear this stuff for themselves. **BP**