

# A SVELTER BELTER

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**JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT A 10"-12" WOULD NEVER FEATURE AN ENORMOUS BOTTOM, ALONG CAME THE SWEDES WITH YET ANOTHER EYE-CATCHING MODEL. PHIL DOBSON DIVES IN FOR A FULL DOSE OF SEVERE EBS.**

Many of the guitar amp world's global brand giants make some truly amazing gear. With serious intent, they occasionally venture into the realms of electric bass but alas, their flagship products, biggest adverts and flashiest trade show backdrops are almost-exclusively adorned by images of six- or seven-string guitar idols, sporting expensive sunglasses and highly questionable trouser-ware. Leaves us bassists a little cold at times, doesn't it?

So, it makes a pleasant change to have a few independent big hitters emerging in the bass world, whose sole purpose is to satisfy the fundamental demands of the many four- and five-string unsung heroes lurking in the shadows. Are you squinting comfortably? Then I'll begin...

Once upon a time, out in the wilds of Sweden, there lived a dedicated group of bass players who decided that their main purpose in life was to design and build good quality amps, cabs and pedals purely for bass players.

Just fairy-tale stuff? Fortunately not. Maybe we will all live happily ever after if EBS has anything to do with it.

## PRE & POWER AMP

Neatly packaged in a 2U rack format, the HD350 has a slightly understated and yet smoothly profes-



sional exterior. In addition to the rack bolt-holes, exterior highly polished flared handles offer an additional facility for handling or rack positioning.

A quick scan along the front panel reveals small profile, very smooth-action control knobs for gain, compressor or limiter, middle frequency notch/boost selection, treble, bright, drive and master volume. That last sentence uncovers features-amundo, special mentions deserving of the 'drive' which emulates a 12AX7 tube front end (mmm) and the inbuilt compressor which never hurts for smoothing things out. And, lest it goes unnoticed on the volume and drive pots, these ones go up to 11 in true Spinal tap style. That's one

more, isn't it) etc...

Compact positive in/out switches provide 'character', filter bypass, post-EQ DI and ground lift for the DI output socket. Power-on reveals a striking ice-blue power-on indication neon - now how cool is that?

Glancing around the back, there is a neat square array of jack sockets - line out, tuner out, and send and return effects loop patches. Speaker output connections are Speakon only - there's not a jack socket in sight on the power stages of this amp, so make sure that you have a Speakon lead to hand, and a spare, the minute you place your order. In fact, stuff one under the seat in your car as well for all those times you forget to pick one up as you run out the front door.

While it takes a little controlled thought to figure out calmly, the DIP switches on the rear of the amp offer some advanced/technical touches - phantom power is available for your active bass via the input socket and, it's also available for your effects pedals (EBS of course) via the loop connections, plus speaker emulation is available for use on the balanced audio output. Although not directly sound profiling, it's all good functional stuff that makes a great deal of sense for hassle-free gigging and recording.

## Complaint Department

It's hard to check the position of the HD350's buttons - they're small and black and surrounded by a non-contrasting black panel. When you're moving the amp, buttons can get bumped accidentally. Status-indicating LEDs could ensure that the buttons are in their desired positions. Tuner mute buttons have become standard on amps in the last few years; even though the HD350 has a tuner-out jack, a mute button is conspicuously absent. The HD350 has Speakon output jacks but no 1/4" output jacks. EBS tells us that European electrical-safety standards do not allow 1/4" jacks for high-

power amplifier outputs - so don't forget to pack those Speakon-equipped speaker cables on your way to the gig. Portable Smorgasbord The EBS HD350 proves that you don't need an entire forest of knobs to get a good sound - just a few well-chosen (and well-voiced) tone controls. Its light-weight, compact size makes it painless to transport, and its reasonable price makes it painless on your pocket book as well. No, it won't make you sound exactly like Marcus - he keeps the secret of his elusive sound under his hat.

## WHAT'S NEO, PUSSYCAT? YOU AND YOUR MAGNETS

**One of the current trends in guitar speaker design is the use of Neodymium material for magnets.**

This material is around 20 times lighter than what you'd find in a traditional guitar speaker (for the equivalent magnetism). Good for small, high-power speakers, the first generation 'big' neo speakers suffered physical problems in that it didn't provide sufficient cooling for the voice coil, thus meaning quick burnouts.

However, many manufacturers have overcome this by using various coolants, and neo speakers are slowly but surely filtering into many a high-quality amp stable, particularly where bass rigs are concerned.

## CABINET & SPEAKERS

Both of these cabs are well finished with the same evident quality as other EBS range of full-sized cabinets. High quality black felt covering and grooved plastic stackable corners support a durable/impressive metal chromed front protection grille with an interwoven design.

Clever inset position and design of both hinged carry handles (with one on the left end and one on the underside front of the cab) offers endless configurations for tilt-positioning of these cabs when in use - simple, but astute design.

As the names suggest, the NEO-110 main driver is an EBS-specified 10-inch driver, the NEO-112 with an equivalent 12, more of which presently. Both cabinets have an internal crossover linked to a two-inch titanium tweeter for the sparkly stuff. The rear socket panel of both cabinets reveals a Speakon input connector paralleled to a 1/4-inch jack, with a linked pair of Speakon outs or 1/4-inch jack out for daisy chaining of further cabinets. In the middle of this panel sits the tweeter gain/attenuation control for global cabinet voicing at the upper end.

Matching a 350-watt professional-looking amp head with two smallish compact speaker cabs might sound a bit top-heavy or ambitious for some, but the potential for greatness is thankfully here in abundance. Compact cabinets are not a new idea in the bass world, but many manufacturers have struggled to get the full potential out of their compact designs. Perhaps, in retrospect, they might have put too much design effort into portability, and too little into how to achieve effective audio capability within restricted volumetric limits?

From the evidence here, it seems that EBS has got the balance of technology and tradition about right - with a little bit of thought and a lot of clever design, small most definitely is booty-full.

The secret weapon in both EBS compact NEO cabinets - and the reason for their name - is the use of Neodymium material in the magnet/voice coil area of the speakers. By replacing the traditional large magnet designs that have been an essential part of proven bass enclosure design, this alternative material solution, linked with a serious approach to tuned port/enclosure design, makes this range of speakers surprisingly small and light and yet tremendously effective.

## SOUNDS

The input gain matching and potential of the HD350 amp is wide ranging, being equally at home with traditional passive basses or 9- or even

18-Volt active four- or five-string basses.

An inbuilt pre-shape 'character' button gives the option of that trusty offset soup-ladle EQ. A drop off three to five dB between the 250KHz and 1KHz, coming back up at about the same slope between 2KHz and 5KHz - an ideal starting point for the basis of any classic soul, country or blues sound.

The compressor/limiter has an overall control and subtlety that most bass players had sought throughout the late 1980s and '90s - regrettably, the macho leanings of some of the stadium-sounding glitzy gear of the time just didn't quite hit the spot like this does.

With bass, treble, bright controls in defeat position and a thoroughly sensible middle-frequency with a little or no attenuation, the HD350 gives some good solid tones. Unleash your tweaking fingers and you can then suddenly step up a gear to the truly professional stage potential of this amp and speaker configuration.

The dynamic capabilities of the main EQ are very impressive. Astute use of bass, middle/notch, treble and bright controls give endless possibilities. Whether you're a balladier, a soul man, an old blues/rocker or a seriously thumb-strong slaphappy type, most, if not all bases (and basses!) are covered.

Add in the additional drive control, and the inbuilt tube emulation stage kicks in on all frequencies above 350Hz. As the low end is bypassed and effectively left as tight as a Mallard's chuff, over the whole range this produces a seriously solid bottom end with subtle yet warm distortion in the mid-range that, at normal volumes, never quite saturates or breaks up. With careful and controlled piloting, the vintage fatness and growl akin to any old P-bass can frequently grab you fondly by the charlies, while leaving you free to add in extra high-end presence at will.

I am truly amazed by this performance to size/weight ratio of this set-up. A 350-watt amplifier

without real valves should never, by law, be allowed to endanger your internal organs to this extent. Similarly, small portable enclosures never are so destructive to the seams of your trousers!

With all these subtle but usable EQ combinations, this rig can deliver some very serious full range/low end sounds, even from these small NEO cabinets. If Sly and Robbie ever ventured into a club in the Arctic Circle in a small family hatchback, maybe they might just sound like this.

**GB CONCLUSION  
THOROUGHLY PRO, EASY TO USE AND BRILLIANT SOUNDS. EBS IS ON TO A WINNER.**

**EBS gear just has to be taken seriously - fro those of you who might have previously thought that Gorm and Fafner were a firm of lawyers on The Simpsons, please take note.**

Jonas Hellborg, Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller, Paul Jackson Victor Bailey and Jimmy Earl now top a list of top-notch session/touring players who use this stuff, augmented by the stadium rock pedigree of Roger Glover, Doug Wimbish, Hugh McDonald and plenty of others.

Our own experience, meanwhile, returns the verdict that EBS bass gear simply oozes attitude and class, evidently proud to wear its understated black and blue livery. For a range of bass gear whose function i life is to kick no small amount of ass as and when required, that is not a bad colour scheme at all. Extremely impressive. **GB**

