



Markbass MoMark 800 Power Frame & Modules & Markbass 4 x 10 Cabinet

£1,100 & £1,034

Guitarist CHOICE

With mix 'n' match preamp modules, here's a way to potentially achieve your own perfectly configured bass head *by Roger Newell*

Are you a bassist who feels as if there's not a bass head out there that really caters to your needs? Well then, Markbass has come up with an answer. Offering a new range of modular amplification, the MoMark system presents a variety of amp shells and a selection of plug-in modules that combine to produce the perfect amp for you. With recent expansion to the range, the choice is impressive – you can mix and match to make things as simple or as complicated as you wish, depending on your needs and the size of your wallet.

An amp frame houses the modules and even here there's a choice of configurations and power ratings. Each has the ability to accept three modules, so think input, tone shaping and master output. For our review we've chosen the 800 (the most powerful of the amp shells) and as this is designed to handle really big gigs, we've loaded it accordingly. Although several modules were supplied, we haven't tried to be clever here or to review all that we had (although all performed with

style), we've merely assembled a competent configuration at a mid-range price. So nothing overly fussy, just what we feel are the essential elements in a bass amp. In the front end we have a valve involved, for the EQ section we have a four-band with semi-parametric mid shift controls and a very simple power stage with just a master volume control.

Having made our selection of modules, they need to be fitted into the power amp frame. These slot in easily and the contact between module and frame is very positive, essential when considering the vibration a bass amp has to endure. An insertion tool, Allen key and hex screws are supplied to secure the modules, and the tool is essential for removing them. The frame includes a cooling fan, two Speakon connectors, effects loop and an XLR-balanced line output, so once the modules are secured your chosen amp configuration is ready to use.

Completing this review rig is the Markbass STD 104HF cabinet. This is a well-constructed unit, and with a

power rating of 800 watts it should be enough for our head configuration. Loaded with the distinctive yellow-coned neodymium speakers, this sturdy 4 x 10 unit has front portal slots along the top and bottom of the front baffle, as well as a centrally positioned custom horn. Finished in black flock, the speakers are

protected by a metal grille and located to the side is an attenuator for adjusting the sensitivity of the horn. This is so much easier to adjust here than with the more usual location on the back panel as you can directly hear the changes as you apply them rather than having to keep walking around to check. Other manufacturers please take note! Curiously, there are no feet fitted, but this is obviously a plus when stacking cabinets. Connect using a Speakon cable (preferred) or a standard jack speaker lead and away we go.

Sounds

Switching on reveals illuminated vertical orange strips at the sides of the modules and reminds you that you're experiencing something unique here. The first thing you notice is an almost complete lack of background noise, which for something this powerful is a great attribute. There's just a single input, so the input volume needs to be adjusted to suit your bass guitar

The rivals

Modular bass heads aren't common, but there are some similar options. If portability is an issue, the **TC Electronic RH450** head (£899) fits the bill – we love its performance and power. The **Euphonic Audio iAMP 800** (£1,169) also packs a lot into its small size, including the unique EA tone shaping section. If it's raw power you want the **Eden WT800C Stereo Bass Head** (£1,400) has 880 watts when used in bridged mono mode. The usual Eden quality is here, as are the five-way semi-parametric tone controls.



Swapping modules is an easy task

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP SOWELS

type. Turned up, it will also introduce the tonal warmth from the valve, added fullness to the sound and even a little overdrive. Valve colouring is something most all-round bass players appreciate and the operation here is pleasingly subtle. A green 'clip' indicator and a mute switch are also thoughtfully provided.

The most complicated part of our chosen head is the EQ section. The standard four-band of low, mid frequency low, mid frequency high and high is supplemented by two level controls associated with the two mid controls. These are semi-parametric in operation and focus on the selected frequency covered by each of the mid controls. The mid frequencies are a vital element for bass as they can make (or break) your delivery, as well as your tone. So having two controls is always desirable, but with this you can adjust the potency of each of your selections for even greater effect. Finally, on the power stage, all we have is the master volume and with the full backup of this 800-watt power shell, it's capable of piling on an awesome amount of output.

While this combination maximises on power and delivery, it truly excels in the tonal quality stakes. In fact, even when the EQ section is set flat, it sounds quite superb. This means you can emphasise the natural sound of any bass, but obviously you have the ability to enhance any of the tonal areas that may be less potent. With the added valve warmth and a gutsy delivery, this is a great set-up for all bass players.

Increasing the high control certainly adds definition, but lifting the high mid level retains a more robust quality that the modernists and slap players will appreciate. At the other end of the scale the low-end is full and fruity, so much so that if you cut all the higher frequencies and just pile on the bottom-end you still get a great (if somewhat old fashioned) sound. In reality, by taking the middle course of adding and subtracting frequencies at will, sonic success is guaranteed and all with that distinctive Markbass tone and quality. What's more, this single 4 x 10

cabinet will take all you throw at it and still produce a full and throaty roar.

Verdict

Given the reputation of Markbass products, we expected this to be a good rig, but it proves to be quite exceptional. We are seriously impressed by the power and tonal purity on offer, not least because the cabinet seems to chuck it all out without so much as a murmur of protest.

With so many modules and amp shells available, you really can be as economic or as over-the-top as suits your pocket. But whatever your point of entry, you can rest assured that you'll get classic Markbass sound quality and delivery. Even the smallest shell and simplest of modules will please most bass players no end.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this system is that with a few alternative modules to hand you can precisely tailor your rig to literally any gigging or recording situation. And being so compact and light, these can be easily carried at all times. A great concept, very well executed. **G**

The bottom line

We like: The ability to have exactly the right amp head for your needs; top quality sounds; powerful delivery

We dislike: There's a lot of plastic here and the initial assembly delays the plug-in-and-play factor

Guitarist says: Decently priced and the ultimate in amplifier versatility. If you change band or your playing technique you can adjust your head to suit – an amp for life?



The other modules, such as this solid-state preamp, offer amazing versatility

**Guitarist
CHOICE**



Markbass MoMark Power Amp Frame 800 Digital

PRICE: £814.20

ORIGIN: Italy

TYPE: Power amp unit and housing for MoMark modules

OUTPUT: 800 watts RMS at four ohms/500watts at eight ohms
DIMENSIONS: 330 (w) x 270 (d) x 82mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.5/7.7

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Neutrik connectors, fan cooling, effects loop, balanced line out

RANGE OPTIONS: 250W Analogue (£484); 500W Analogue (£615); 600W Digital (£716)

Markbass STD 104HF Cabinet

PRICE: £1,033.85

ORIGIN: Italy

OUTPUT: 800 watts RMS at four or eight ohms

DIMENSIONS: 594 (w) x 480 (d) x 739mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 30/66

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Front-ported top and bottom

SPEAKERS: Four B&C neodymium speakers and one-inch compression driver with custom horn

RANGE OPTIONS: STD 102HF (£742); STD 151 HR (£791.20); STD 104HR (£986)

Yellow Case Preamp Module T1M

TYPE: Valve-loaded preamp module

PRICE: £112.70

CHANNELS: Single

CONTROLS: Mute Switch

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Clip indicator, mute switch

OPTIONS: S1 Solid State (£69); S1M Solid State (£70); S2 Solid State (£126); T1-HE Solid State (£207); S1-HE Solid State (£159)

Red Case EQ Module EQ42S

TYPE: Four-band plus two semi-parametric controls module

PRICE: £95.45

CONTROLS: Low, mid low, mid low level, mid high, mid high level, high

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: None

OPTIONS: EQ Flat Sound (£49); EQ4 four-band (£85); EQ7G (£115); EQS4 with two switchable four-band EQ (£122)

Black Case Master Module M0

TYPE: Master Volume module

PRICE: £79.35

CONTROLS: Master volume

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Power switch

OPTIONS: MVV filters (£89); MVVL filters and line out level (£95); M2VLFM (£113)

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Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★