



IK Multimedia Tonex Cab

In an ever-growing sector of viable monitoring solutions allowing us to hear our carefully crafted digital guitar tones, IK Multimedia enters the fray

By Pete Emery

INEVITABLY, WE NOW have several viable monitoring solutions including the Laney LFR 112/412, Line 6 Powercab, Headrush FRFR and the Fender Tone Master FR-12 that can deliver our carefully crafted digital tones at stage levels. Now Ik Multimedia is entering the fray with the Tonex Cab.

As we have come to expect from the Italian brand – it comes with extra features here that, if they work as intended, might make the Tonex Cab a strong contender in the market – despite a comparatively premium price point.

The Tonex cab is currently available for pre-order at a reduced price, with pre-orders ending 15 April

Following the success of the Tonex Pedal, which expanded from IK’s Tonex plugin software, the Tonex Cab is the company’s first FRFR (Full Range, Flat Response) speaker cabinet. The intention here is to provide amplification to those who want to reap the benefits of digital algorithms, without missing out on the joy of playing guitar with some real stage volume.

It may seem a little strange to go amless only to replace said amp with something that looks like, and takes up roughly the same stage room as, well, a guitar amp. The benefits here are in the other upsides of digital modeling and similar technologies, such as the ability to go straight to the desk, consistency in sound and amp modeler-ficussed extra features whilst trying to mitigate the downsides of the compromised amp feel and lack of a speaker “pushing air around”.

And this isn’t reserved for users of the Tonex line of pedals either. For better or for worse depending on your ownership and expectations, the Tonex Cab can potentially work equally well with other non-Tonex modelers that are paired with the feature-set here. Although the completist within me greatly appreciates having a pedal that matches the cab.

Build quality

First impressions are great. The faux leather handle looks good and feels sturdy when lifting the relatively light 12.7kg of mass, and it is nice and compact, saving valuable real estate on stage. The wooden construction is hefty enough that I wouldn’t be worrying about any hasty tear-down mishaps come the end of a gig either.

The pros for the working musician are furthered by the inclusion of legs that allow the cab to tilt back, directing the sound at the player’s ears rather than blasting past their knees and melting the ears of those in the front row.

However, an issue worth mentioning here is that the legs rub against the sides of the cab a little as they are being deployed. Whilst there were no signs of marks appearing during testing, I do have concerns that repeated use over an extended period may eventually mark up the cab’s sides.

Moving around to the front, I find one of the features that set the Tonex Cab apart - a removable and changeable baffle. The test model includes the black grill with the other options being a Gold or Silver, all of which hark back to more traditional amplifiers and make the Tonex Cab look completely at home on stage.

The removal of the baffle is easy to figure out and facilitated by a tag at the bottom right. A tag that is bright red. In my opinion, it draws the eye a bit too much. I would rather see it sporting the same colour as the baffles or sides so that it blends into the rest of the cab better. In general though, the cab is well put together and has clearly been designed with the gigging musician in mind.

Usability

Plug in the cab, connect your modeler, turn it up and go. Easy. It’s always a good sign when a user can get a unit up and running in its basic function without having to refer to the manual, and that is certainly the case here.

The EQ controls are notched at the point at which they are set flat - a small but appreciated touch when looking to preserve

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our painstakingly created preset tones. Easy too is the saving and recalling of presets as the method for doing so is clearly displayed alongside the relevant controls without the need for any form of digital display or menu diving. No danger of clipping the input either as the eight LED preset lights double up as an easy-to-read input meter.

In terms of the I/O , there are two combo input jacks, one for guitar and another for aux, and an XLR out, which can be fed straight to the desk. Alongside the XLR out, we have a pre/post slider switch which allows us to choose whether we want to send out EQ changes on the cab to the sound desk.

This function is superfluous for those who can route different EQs to different outputs from something like a Line 6 Helix or Neural DSP Quad Cortex, however, a valuable inclusion if you’re using a modeler without these routing options.

Getting into the deeper functions, I find myself with an app to get my head around. Having previously taken some criticism for the difficulty of using the apps associated with the Tonex Pedal, IK Multimedia has taken heed with the Tonex Cab app, and I found it very intuitive and easy to use.

The app allows for the building of presets from your PC or Mac and more importantly, is also the method through which IRs are loaded into the presets. Additionally (separate from the app), we also have MIDI capability, facilitating the preset changes over Program Change messages. The value of these features will certainly depend on your needs and modeler capabilities.

It’s fair to say users of capable, fully featured floorboards such as the Line 6 Helix might find better value in more affordable FRFR’s without these extras, as a lot of the added functionality of the Tonex Cab may already be found in the multi-fx pedal / amp modeler.

That’s not to say there isn’t a place for the Tonex cab. The added functionality it boasts comes into its own when used in conjunction with a more streamlined pedalboard-friendly style of modeler, such as the UA amp pedals and IK’s own Tonex Pedal line – which makes sense.

In this context, the Tonex Cab helps extend the facility available in live situations through an intuitive, user-friendly experience. And proves to be useful where multiple units are being used, providing a way to apply changes in IR’s and EQ presets globally without repeating the same changes on each unit.

Sounds

If this is your first foray into the world of FRFR cabs, you would be forgiven for assuming that full-range flat-response speakers would all replicate your tones in pretty much the same way. This is what flat response means, right? Flat. However, there are differences in tone often caused by the speaker selection and cabinet construction.

The good news for the Tonex Cab is that it sounds fantastic. Testing through both my Tonex Pedal and Line 6 Helix Floor, the high end is clear without any sense of brittleness, the mid frequencies are well represented and the lows are nice and full in a way that is mightily impressive considering the 12” speaker here.

And it is loud. Standing in a mid-sized studio, I gradually pushed the volume up to see how far the cab would go before it started to complain. My ears threw in the towel before the cab did.

Compared to some other offerings, the 350-watt RMS/750-watt peak does not seem like

GUITAR VERDICT



For those looking to amplify a modeler of the slimmed-down, pedalboard-friendly ilk, the feature-packed Tonex Cab offers a lot of extra scope in a compact, intuitive and pleasingly loud FRFR package.

PROS

- + Great performance.
- + Feature-filled.
- + Surprisingly loud!

CONS

- Legs rub on the side of the cab when deploying.
- Some features already available in flagship modelers.
- Pricier than other offerings.

SPECS

TYPE: Powered full range cabinet (FRFR)
OUTPUT: 350w RMS 700w peak
SPEAKER: 12” Custom Celestion speaker, 1” Lavoc compression driver
CONTROLS: 3-band EQ, Amp tone control, volume
FEATURES: Amp Tone Control (changes mid character and audio dispersion), IR loading, 3-band EQ, Post/Pre EQ switch for output to desk, midi programmable, eight presets, interchangeable front baffle,
CONNECTIVITY: 2x combo XLR/ 1/4 inch inputs, midi in/out, XLR out, USB B
WEIGHT: 28lbs (12.7kg)
DIMENSIONS: 546mm x 432mm x 230mm

much on paper, but don’t let that fool you. Wattage is not a one-to-one relationship with volume, there is plenty of that here to easily keep up with even the most obnoxious of loud drummers and more yet beyond that.

But with great volume comes great responsibility, and a 3-band EQ gives you easy-access tone-shaping. The sweep for both the Bass and Mid controls is reasonable, enough to make adjustments for a room without any risk of overdoing it, whilst the treble control had a broader but still completely useable range.

Having played many gigs on temporary stages being shaken by the low end from the monitors sitting atop it, the ability to easily cut the bass from the cab whilst sending unaffected audio to the desk is very appealing to me.

Providing a little more than just EQ, a particularly interesting feature is the Amp Tone control. In IK’s words, “When you turn the Amp Tone knob towards the Live setting, it enhances the mid-range focus, which is crucial for making your guitar shine in a band context - on stage and beyond - especially at high volumes. Additionally, it affects how Tonex Cab disperses sound in the surrounding space. All of this is designed to give you the feeling of playing through a real guitar amp rather than an FRFR speaker.”

From a player’s perspective, the change in mid-range is something akin to what can be expected if we were to add a nice room mic to the tone. It also gave the cab a slightly different feel beyond just an EQ tweak, and was indeed a little more reminiscent of playing through a real amp.

I’m not about to proclaim this to be the death of tube amps, but it does help an already good modeling tone get that little bit closer in terms of feel. In just having some fun with the unit, I found myself leaving the Amp Tone control set halfway between the live and amp setting on both my Tonex Pedal and my Line 6 Helix, which is a testament in itself.

Verdict

The pricing of the Tonex Cab sits above most of its competitors, which is perhaps not surprising given the wider range of features on offer. However, these features are not going to be of use to everybody as users of full-sized floorboards may find equal functionality at their feet.

Where the Tonex Cab shines is through the Amp Tone feature and extending the capabilities of smaller modelers like IK’s own Tonex line of pedals or products like the Blackstar Amped and UAFX amp pedals. In this context, it furthers what is available to us, allowing valuable and easily accessible features in the heat of performing live music.

