



Gallien-Krueger

MB200, MB500 & MB Fusion

In the hectic bass amp market, small seems to be the new big, but will this tiny trio have what it takes to bowl us over? Mike Brooks puts them through boot camp.

Ranging from 200 watts through to 500 watts, with an assortment of features, these GK units have each been designed with the same premise: power, quality of tone and practical functionality, underlined by impressive portability. Class-D power amps have pretty much taken weight problems out of the amp design equation, with many manufacturers now offering a Class-D amp range. So how will these GK heads measure up?

Features

The design aesthetic for each amp is fairly similar, utilising the same controls and general layout on the front and rear panel. All three incorporate the front-mounted rack lugs and come pre-drilled with screw

threads for rack mounting, though not the rack mounting frame. (While on the subject of rack mounting, it is worth noting that the height measurements in the unit specifications have been measured without the rubber feet being attached (add 19 mm to the measurement with the feet added). The brushed silver casings of the solid-state MB200 and 500 models feel pretty tough, with the MB Fusion, which incorporates three 12AX7 valves, sharing the charcoal-grey colouring of its bigger brother, the GK Fusion 550. All three units display side venting and come fitted with temperature-sensitive fans that kick into action when the amps are being driven hard. One thing these amps couldn't be accused of is being filled with gimmicks

– the front end of each is about as simple and uncluttered as you could wish for.

MB200

The MB200 is the most diminutive of the three and will easily fit into a gig bag or case. Whether bought as a main

amp or as a backup, its size and relative footprint means that you'll barely notice you have it with you. In fact, were the rack lugs removable, its dimensions would be virtually perfect. The dB pad and contour switches are level with the other controls so shouldn't be prone to snapping



The MB Fusion and MB500 feature an additional speaker output and footswitch input



The headphone output is coupled with a line output and a combined Speaker/ 1/4-inch jack output

“Lightweight they may be but these amps are most definitely hard-hitters in every respect. GK have brought to market three products that firmly address the requirements of the modern player.”

in transit, and the unit feels surprisingly sturdy despite its transport-friendly weight.

The control options are basic, but totally functional, and a quick peek around the back completes the necessities of a gigging and recording amp, with an XLR DI output with pre/post-EQ levels, an auxiliary input

for adding an MP3 player or CD player to play along with, a headphone output coupled with a line output and a combined Speaker/1/4-inch jack output. The four-band EQ (bass +/-10 dB @ 60 Hz, lo-mid +6 dB/-10 dB @ 250 Hz, hi-mid +6 dB/-10 dB @ 1 kHz, treble +/-14 dB @ 7 kHz) is wired in series, so each band is fed into the next band to create what GK claim is a more natural-sounding EQ.

MB500

The MB500 is double the price of the MB200 but offers more than double the output and comes with some extra features that make it much more versatile. The same dB pad is included but is joined by an additional muting option, an adjustable contour control (which offers a mid



scoop to accentuate the high and low frequencies), a switchable second channel (the footswitch is included) with a master volume and boost control to add grit and harmonic distortion, and a limiter to protect your cabinet(s) from transient peaks in your bass signal. An additional

speaker output is provided along with an FX loop, tuner output and footswitch input.

Both the MB500 and the MB Fusion incorporate GK's proprietary GIVE (Gate Induced Valve Effect) technology, which in performance terms highlights the harmonic qualities and overtones of the bass signal. This should certainly benefit the MB500's sonic display, but the MB Fusion is already equipped with three valves in its preamp section, so how much of an improvement to the tone this technology delivers will be interesting to hear.

MB Fusion

As the most expensive unit on display here, the MB Fusion is naturally the most fully featured. The front panel is equipped with a -14 dB pad selector and includes an additional gain control for the second channel, giving you more control over the channel-boosting options. The rear panel is exactly the same as the MB500, while the top panel allows access to the voicing filter selector switches for setting the central frequency of the tone contour (500 Hz/800 Hz), presence (on/off), and an additional bottom-end boost using the deep control (on/off). The four-band EQ on offer with the Fusion (bass +/-14 dB @ 40 Hz, lo-mid +6/-9 dB @ 250 Hz, hi-mid +5/-8 dB @ 1 kHz, treble +10/-19 dB @ 7 kHz) is also voiced slightly differently compared to the other amps, giving you a broader frequency spectrum to manipulate.

Sounds

Lightweight they may be, but these amps are most definitely hard-hitters in every respect. All three amps were taken out on live gigs to determine just how transportable they were and whether or not they were able to hold their own in a live setting with a full band. We needn't have had any reservations, as each amp delivered a sterling performance without any problems whatsoever.

MB200

The MB200 is the baby brother in terms of power, features and size, but looks can be deceiving. Hooked up to a 4x10 cabinet it's more than capable of competing with a full band, and some prudent use of the EQ meant the bass signal cut through very nicely. We were expecting the sound to be quite harsh, possibly





The MB500 takes everything the MB200 has to offer and doubles it, both in terms of power and features

a little brittle and lifeless, but the MB200 was having none of that and instead pumped out a punchy tone that didn't lack any bottom end and was able to produce sparkling clarity, aided by the on-board tweeter in the cabinet.

A little goes a long way when tweaking the EQ, and the tonal variation is broad enough to cater for most players'

"The sheer power on offer is quite daunting, and with the full range of 500 watts unleashed, we can't imagine anyone being underwhelmed with the MB500's delivery."

requirements. The contour switch produces a major change in tone, which could be very useful for those who like to have one tone for fingerstyle playing and a different tone for pick playing or slap, making it easy to set the amp up for one style and then, by introducing the contour option, call up a totally different tone.

MB500

The MB500 takes everything the MB200 has to offer and doubles it, both in terms of power and features. Being able to add an additional cab, creating a two-cabinet stack, really opens up the sound and means you can really investigate what these heads are all about. The sheer power on offer is quite daunting, and with the full range of 500 watts unleashed, we can't imagine anyone being underwhelmed

with the MB500's delivery. Several high-powered basses that we used required the introduction of the pad reduction, but still the volume levels and integrity of the bass signal were astonishingly clear and precise, no doubt aided by the on-board limiter.

Solid-state amps are often accused of being harsh and clinical, but the MB500 certainly possesses a warmer, rounder quality than many transistor amps, and GK should be applauded for creating an amp, and particularly an EQ section, that shatters the preconception. Offering minimal tonal colouration but being able to combine power and depth of tone at this price is no mean feat. Bringing the channel switching into play allowed the boost control and the GIVE section to show what it could do. The

extra grind and grit was subtle to begin with, but with some experimentation it is possible to add some extra character to the rounded signal and set up an alternate tone via channel B, which could be easily accessed using the footswitch.

MB Fusion

Despite the warmth of tone generated by the MB500, the MB Fusion is the real deal, and the sweetness of tone and harmonic colouration associated with valves hits you like a hammer the moment you start playing. We were initially impressed with the smoothness of the tone, especially when using a pair of Jazz and Precision basses, but with some manipulation of the mid EQ we were soon coaxing some rich, biting, full-bodied classic bass tones out of this set-up.



With the extra channel on offer, this really is a seriously giggable and feature-packed amp. With the extra tonal capabilities and voicing filter controls, coupled with the quality of tone and forceful delivery, this amp means business. For those of you who make use of their amp to change their tone during a performance, the voicing filters will prove a godsend. All three filter controls offer an instant fix if you require a quick change in tone in the high and low registers, without having to radically alter the front-panel EQ controls, but are most effective providing you don't run the four-band EQ to extremes.

Conclusion

Having given these amps a good going-over for the best part of a fortnight, we really can't find too many faults. The MB200 is a star in the making and represents amazing value at just over £250. Whether used as a main amp or as a backup, it is so small and portable that you could stow it away in your gig bag and always feel safe in the knowledge that if your main amp blows, you have an excellent backup waiting in the wings. That said, it is capable of holding its own, its only limitation being that it can only support one cabinet.

The MB500 and Fusion are the bigger brothers, but again, portability is the name of the game here and both units definitely pass with flying colours on every front. Our only gripe, and it is a very small one, is that were these units housed in racks, the player may find it difficult to access the controls mounted on the upper casing. We understand that front-panel space is at a premium and most players may set the controls and then leave them for evermore, but it really depends on how often you change your amp settings as to whether it's a problem or not.

GK certainly deserve some success with these amps. They have brought to market three products that firmly address the requirements of the modern player. In the MB200 they have a hidden gem, so much so that this reviewer is even contemplating adding one to his own gig bag. Or maybe the MB500 ... but then the Fusion has valves ... it's like trying to pick the best from Messi, Maradona and Pelé!



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

GALLIEN-KRUEGER MB200

PRICE: £252

Made in: China

Controls: -10 dB pad switch, gain, contour on/off switch, treble, hi mid, low mid, bass, power switch, pre/post-EQ button, headphones/line-out selector switch

Inputs: 1 x ¼-inch instrument input, 1 x 1¼-inch aux input

Outputs: 1 x dual Speakon/¼-inch output (4–16 ohms), 1 x ¼-inch headphone/line-out output, XLR DI output

Power output: 140 watts @ 8 ohms, 200 watts @ 4 ohms

Dimensions: 44.45(h) x 196.85(w) x 203.2(d) mm

Weight: 0.91 kg (2.0 lb)

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Immensely lightweight and portable. Basic functionality but budget-friendly.

Minus: Can only attach one cabinet.

Overall: A sure-fire winner, you'd be forgiven for thinking this should sound cheap but you couldn't be more wrong. A cracking amp at an amazing price.

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

GALLIEN-KRUEGER MB500

PRICE: £505.20

Made in: China

Controls: -10 dB pad button, mute button, gain, contour, treble, hi mid, low mid, bass, boost, boost button, master b (boost), master volume, power switch, limiter switch, ground lift selector, pre/post-EQ selector, headphones/line-out selector switch

Inputs: 1 x ¼-inch instrument input, ¼-inch footswitch input (included)

Outputs: 2 x dual Speakon/¼-inch outputs (4–16 ohms), 1 x ¼-inch headphone/line-out output, ¼-inch FX send & return sockets, ¼-inch tuner output, XLR DI output

Power output: 350 watts @ 8 ohms, 500 watts @ 4 ohms

Dimensions: 44.45(h) x 279.4(w) x 228.67(d) mm

Weight: 1.7 kg (3 lb 12 oz)

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: A good array of features and quality tone-shaping options, with a respectable power rating, at just over £500, lightweight and highly portable. What more could you ask for?

Minus: Seriously struggling to pinpoint any negative aspects ...

Overall: At around a pound a watt, you're getting great value for money in an amp that doesn't disappoint in any category.

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

GALLIEN-KRUEGER MB FUSION

PRICE: £708

Made in: China

Controls: -14 dB pad button, mute button, gain a, gain b, contour, treble, hi mid, low mid, bass, boost button, master a, master b (boost), power switch, limiter switch, contour switch, presence switch, deep switch ground lift selector, pre/post-EQ selector, headphones/line-out selector switch

Inputs: 1 x ¼-inch instrument input, ¼-inch footswitch input (included)

Outputs: 2 x dual Speakon/¼-inch outputs (4–16 ohms), 1 x ¼-inch headphone/line-out output, ¼-inch FX send & return sockets, ¼-inch tuner output, XLR DI output

Power output: 350 watts @ 8 ohms, 500 watts @ 4 ohms

Dimensions: 44.45(h) x 279.4(w) x 274.65(d) mm

Weight: 2.04 kg (4.5 lb)

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Everything the working bassist needs in one small but perfectly formed amp. The twin-channel facility is a real bonus.

Minus: At this price there is some competition, but the reduced dimensions and lightweight characteristics will see off bulkier offerings.

Overall: A reasonable price for a feature-laden amp that performs very well.

CONTACT DETAILS

POLARaudio UK Ltd

Tel: 01444 258258

www.polaraudio.co.uk

www.gallien-krueger.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING

