



TC Electronic BG500 Combo

The latest combo from TC Electronic's Bass 2.0 range boasts an innovative feature set and 500 watts of power. Nick Wells investigates.

Ever since the launch of the RebelHead 450, which has remained at the forefront of TC's innovative Bass 2.0 concept, the Danish company has continued to develop and expand the range, releasing a stream of new models, from the Classic 450 and Staccato '51 amps, the latter of which was developed with the illustrious Rocco Prestia of Tower of Power, along with their 'rugged science' (RS)-designed, vertical-stacking cabs and combos.

The BG500 combo is the latest to emerge from the TC Bass 2.0 stable. This feature-packed unit is available in both 115 and 210 speaker configurations and, like the RH450, boasts three user presets, built-in SpectraComp compression and TubeTone valve simulation, plus a few new additions too.

Features

Both 500-watt amps in the two BG500 models are identical, leaving you with the choice of a 210- or 115-speaker configuration. The speakers are custom Eminence drivers, and both versions come with an Eminence neo tweeter. The cabinet itself is front-ported, with a carpet covering and a curved front panel that lends the overall design a really sleek, modern appearance.

The amp section has a single input for both active and passive basses, a gain control with peak indicator LED, and a built-in tuner that will work with 4- and 5-string basses –

two flashing lights indicate whether you're sharp or flat, glowing together at the same time when you're in tune. The 5-string indicator LEDs also serve as a level indicator for TC's SpectraComp three-band compression, which was originally developed for the RH450 and, unlike regular single-band compression, compresses the lows, mids and high frequencies independently, the idea being to produce a more balanced tone.

Alongside bass, lo-mid, hi-mid and treble EQ controls, you can also select two preset EQ curves via the contour

button – perfect if you're a little unsure about tweaking the EQ or if you're in need of a giggable bass sound in a hurry. Alternatively, just like the RH450, the BG500 has three user memories, which can be saved and recalled at the push of a button. Once you've set the front panel controls how you want them, a green LED will flash to recognise the new setting, at which point pressing and holding one of the memory buttons will store that setting. It really is that easy.

Next up is the TweeterTone control – a new addition to the Bass 2.0 range that let's you

adjust the level of the Eminence neo tweeter from the front panel, rather than having to reach around the back of the combo. In its new position, you can easily adjust the intensity of the treble and how it blends with the speaker mid gig.

The TubeTone effect is another feature taken from the RH450, and was designed to replicate the sound of an all-tube amp. The control's settings range from 0 to 10, giving you a variety of overdriven sounds. Sockets for headphones, an auxiliary input and a balanced DI with a pre/post-EQ button can also be found on the front panel.

Sounds

As we've come to expect from TC Electronic's existing crop of bass amps, with the BG500 the sheer range of features, along with the scope with which you can shape your



TC's SpectraComp three band compression compresses the lows, mids and high frequencies independently



The three user memories can be saved and recalled at the push of a button

fundamental tone, means that you'd be hard-pushed to find a sound that you couldn't gig with almost immediately. The preset contours are a great place to start, and the EQ is equally intuitive to use. While both amp sections are identical, the 210 sounds a little tighter in its note response, while the 115 model has a warmer, more rounded tone. You should find that 500 watts is more than enough power for most gigs, but you can easily send a signal out to the house PA via the balanced DI should you need a bit more presence in the mix.

If you're regularly out gigging, then the three presets will prove very useful and almost addictive. You can essentially set up three different bass sounds, either to suit different basses, different songs or playing techniques, or even different venues or bands, and then seamlessly switch between them.

The TubeTone delivers all the front-end distortion that you'd expect from a bona fide valve amp, but from a solid-state circuit. If you crank the gain and then move the TubeTone

control through its full range, you can dial in sounds ranging from gritty distortion to regular overdrive. If you need a cleaner sound, engage the SpectraComp compressor, which does a great job in balancing the sound rather than killing the amp's dynamics.

The last point we want to touch on is the TweeterTone feature, which makes its debut with the BG500. Unlike a regular attenuator, the TweeterTone gives you more control over treble levels, allowing you to make far better use of the amp's higher frequencies. It's a really flexible control and a welcome addition alongside the already pretty comprehensive feature set.

Conclusion

When it comes to combo amps, TC Electronic have undoubtedly raised the bar with the BG500. Either one of the two speaker configurations would be a really good buy for anyone in need of a reliable and user-friendly gigging amp, with plenty of power, that won't cost the earth. The intuitive front-panel layout gives you complete

control over the built-in features, meaning you can dial in a range of bass sounds, mute the signal, tune up quickly, or even adjust the tweeter. The bass sounds on offer are really good and will perform well whatever genre you're into.

As far as we can see, the only downfall with this amp, and it is a minor one, is its portability. The BG500 weighs in at 32 kg, but the real issue is its bulk, and we'd definitely suggest getting some help when moving the amp around. Still, bearing in mind the company's flagship RH450 retails at almost double the price of the BG500, you start to get an idea of exactly what this combo has to offer.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

TC ELECTRONIC BG500

Price: £609 (£569 for the 115 combo)

Built in: China

Type: Solid-state bass combo

Power output: 500 watts @ 4 ohms

Speakers: 2 x Custom Eminence & Eminence neo tweeter (1 x Custom Eminence speaker for the 115)

Features: Master volume & gain controls, SpectraComp, single channel to suit passive & active basses, bass, low-mid, high-mid & treble EQ controls, TubeTone, TweeterTone, integrated chromatic tuner, mute & contour buttons, 3 user memories, headphone socket, balanced DI, aux input for CD/MP3 player & inbuilt protection circuit

Dimensions: 735(h) x 410(w) x 475(d) mm

Weight: 32 kg (70.5 lb)

CONTACT DETAILS

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WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Powerful bass tones coupled with easy-to-use features.

Minus: Not overly portable.

Overall: An affordable and feature-packed combo that packs plenty of low-end rumble.

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BGM RATING



We asked BGM reader Chris Shepperson for his thoughts on the new BG500 210.

What were your first impressions of the BG500?

Very good. Its price is very competitive and it's 500 watts, which I think is more than enough power for almost all scenarios, be it live or in the studio. It has more features than most of the competition too. Sound-wise it's very clean and defined, and the controls are all well laid out, with the live musician in mind. I really liked having the tweeter adjustment control on the front panel. I was a little upset that the tuner only tunes B-G as I am a 6-string bass player and imagine it couldn't have been too hard to add a C on there!

What do you think of the build quality?

Fantastic. There is little I could find fault with. It is a tad heavy given the weight of some other combos out there, but that's a minor point given its overall quality. If I was forced to find a weak point I'd say the knobs on the control panel are a little loose and turn almost too easily; it's a pretty minor point, though. Otherwise it's a definite 9/10 for build quality.

And how about the SpectraComp/TubeTone features?

Both are very good. The SpectraComp doesn't seem to work all that well for rehearsal or practice purposes when compared to a traditional one-band compressor, due to the large volume boost it gives you and the notes it cuts. Live, I find I dig in much more and the sound stays a little more constant. The compressed sound is, however, very, very good and gives you a fantastic slap sound. The TubeTone does what it says on the tin – from a little saturation and warmth through to full-on valve overdrive. With a little mid boost it turns the amp into a very aggressive rock/metal amp.

Do you use the user presets?

I currently have two preset sounds stored. At first I tried using them to set up separate sounds: for example, one memory set for slap, one with an overdriven valve tone etc... Now I dedicate a preset to each of my basses. I play a GB Spitfire, a Roscoe Century STD Fretless and a Yamaha TRB, and they all have very different sounds. For the purpose of changing instruments and starting with a blank

canvas, I have the presets set up to effectively give me a flat EQ for each bass so I can dial in the tones myself.

How does the sound compare to other amps you've used in the past?

I have used and owned many different amps. For the last 18

months (until the arrival of the BG500) I have considered myself an EBS user. The BG500 sound is much more hi-fi than my EBS tone and a little more forgiving to the touch of the string. The flat EQ tone suits finger funk playing perfectly. I would say, however, that the tone from my fretless does not sit all that well with

the TC tone, and it took me a long time to get a smooth fretless sound, but with a fretted bass, it's killer. It won't make me stop using EBS for my big rig, but if I had £650 to spend on a top-end amp or combo, then EBS wouldn't appear on the radar, so the comparison is a little unfair.

Chris Shepperson

