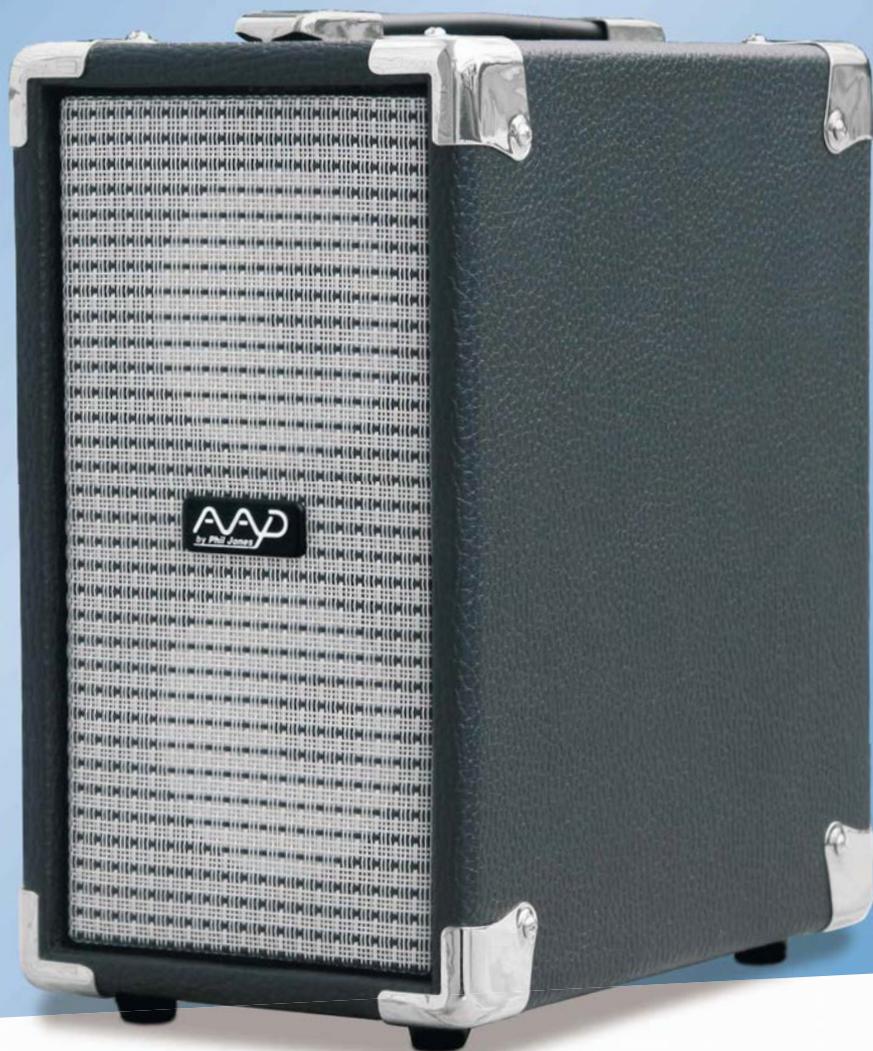


# AAD Cub

## Acoustic guitar amplifier



**We've all become rather used to acoustic guitar amplifiers being smaller than their power rating might suggest, but the AAD Cub takes the compact format to new limits while applying hi-fi design principles to achieve the best possible sound quality.**

Measuring just 6.5 x 11.8 x 12.5 inches (yes, it is just 6.5 inches wide!), The Cub weighs 11.5 lbs, which to put it in perspective, is only a little heavier than a typical Fender Strat. Despite its kiddy-sized footprint, The Cub is rated at 100 Watts and features a universal switch-mode power supply that will work worldwide without the user having to change voltage setting.

The company behind this apparent miracle is American Acoustic Development, well known for their high performance bass amps sold under the PJB (Phil Jones Bass) brand, and Phil also has his name on this design. Though not cheap when priced per kilogram, the retail price does include a fitted gig bag and the build quality suggests that this amplifier is going to give many

years of service.

The Cub is built much like a powered studio monitor but with a vinyl-covered MDF cabinet. The metal rear panel incorporates a heat sink and also houses all the controls and connectors. A simple strap handle on top is more than adequate to carry it in comfort, though the included gig bag also has handles and a small storage pocket for cables or strings. There's nothing on the front of the cabinet except a removable speaker grille that protects a pair of five inch Neo-Power, extended-range drivers covering the 80Hz to 16kHz frequency range necessary to reproduce the acoustic guitar. As the cone drivers are full-range units, there is no need for a separate tweeter. System sensitivity is rated at 95dB/Watt @ 1 metre and the amp has a soft clipping characteristic to keep the sound sweet even when driven to the edge of its power capabilities. Even the signal-to-noise ratio is more in keeping with what you'd expect from a hi-fi amplifier at 95dB.

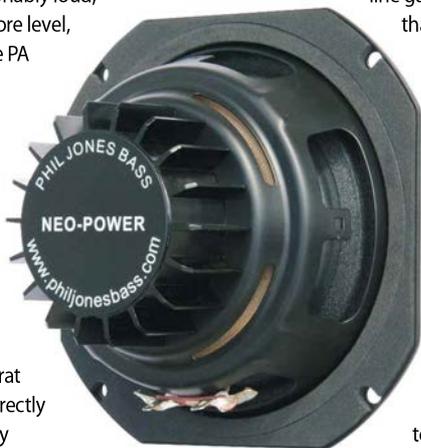
Turning to the rear panel, we find the controls protected from damage by a small metal bar handle that protrudes to the same extent as the heatsink, so even if you lay the amp on its back, the knobs won't touch the ground. A similar bar handle at the bottom of the panel protects the power inlet and power switch. Unlike some acoustic guitar amplifiers which also include XLR mic inputs, The Cub has only a single input switchable between 0dB: >4M $\Omega$ /22pF, 10mVolts-2.5Volts and a -10dB sensitivity with a range of 20mV-5V and an impedance of 100KOhms. In addition to Gain, there are three EQ cut/boost controls, each with a +/-15dB range and operating at fixed frequencies of 100Hz, 1kHz and 10kHz so this section is more like what you'd expect to find on a small mixing console than on an instrument amplifier. There's no notch filter for tackling feedback resonances but there is a send/return loop accessed via quarter inch jacks that allows additional processors to be placed in the signal path. This could be useful because unlike most competing designs, there is no built-in reverb — the Cub is designed to deliver clean power with no frills. By way of self preservation, the solid-state, Class A/B amplifier is protected by an AC line filter, a slow-blow fuse, thermal protection, loudspeaker short-circuit protection and DC output sensing.

On the output side, apart from the effect send and return jacks (the send doubles as an extra line out if you need it to) there is an XLR balanced line output with ground lift switch for connection to a PA system, but what the manual doesn't say is whether or not this is isolated from any phantom power that might be active on the mixer to which it is connected. I queried this and was assured it was immune to phantom power, which is important as most small mixers have globally switchable phantom power so it is almost a certainty that the amp will be on the receiving end of phantom power at some time during its lifetime, intentionally or not. In addition to the balanced XLR, there's also a line

out on a quarter inch jack plus a tuner output, which also doubles as a further line out. Power comes in on an IEC socket with integral mains fuse.

### Testing times

Small though this amplifier is, it is actually capable of playing reasonably loud, and if you need even more level, you can run a DI into the PA system or slave another full-range amplifier. There's more bottom end than you'd expect from anything so small but it is gratifyingly tight and punchy rather than boomy as is often the case with lesser amplifiers and even a Strat or Telecaster plugged directly into the amp gives a very passable electro acoustic sound. Similarly, my Line 6 Variax set to its acoustic guitar model sounded pretty convincing. In addition to piezo pickups, I also tried my Martin with a George L clip-on magnetic soundhole pickup and that sounded as acoustic as you

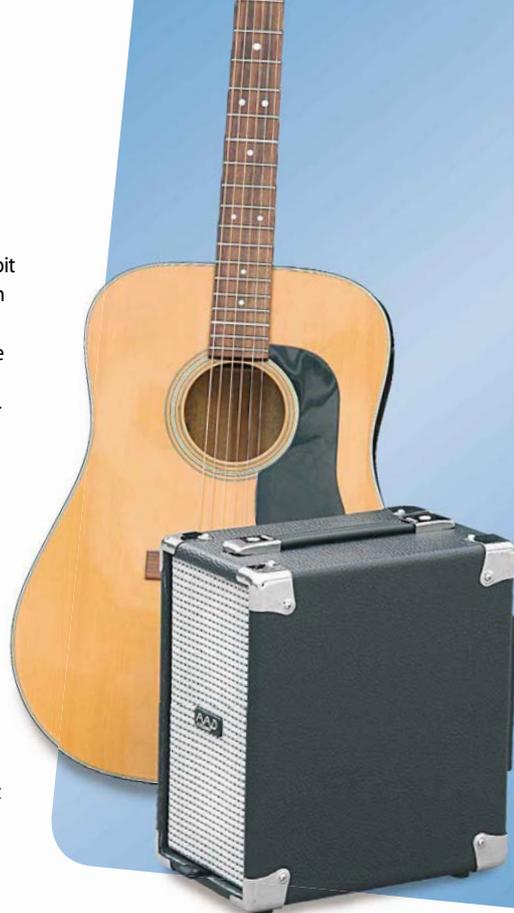


could expect from such a simple magnetic system but I found I had to turn the amplifier gain right up to get a usable level out of it so a bit more gain would have been helpful for use with this type of pickup. However, an inexpensive mini mixer plugged into this amp could provide both effects and a mic input as well as extra

line gain and still come in cheaper than the competition, so that is an option well worth considering. I don't think the sound has quite the airy top end of a system that uses a separate tweeter and if you drive it too hard it also begins to get a tad boxy, but at sensible playing levels it sounds good. This amp might be rated at 100 Watts but nobody would expect it to compete with, say, a 100 Watt Marshall stack. Whenever you miniaturise a speaker system,

it's invariably at the expense of maximum SPL. When you do drive The Cub too hard, the soft clipping gives the sound a spongy feel, a bit like mild overdrive, but then that's better than the sound of hard clipping and might actually work for you if you're playing a slide Dobro.

Ergonomically, some kind of speaker stand or mic stand mount might have been useful and I understand that the company are looking into this for future revisions, but with an amplifier this light, finding somewhere to put it shouldn't be much of a problem. Overall, the tonality is both clean and smooth with no nasty edginess at the top end and the EQ provides scope for general tonal balancing to suit the instrument or room. This tonal smoothness helps dilute the 'quackiness' of some piezo bridge systems but you still need a good pickup to get the best out of this amplifier and pickups with their own tone controls help too as the Cub's EQ is really only for general sound shaping. I would have liked to see a sweepable anti-feedback notch control as these can really get you out of trouble. Ergonomically, the amp is fantastically portable and I can see the sense in putting the controls around the back out of harm's way, but it wouldn't have hurt to put a power LED on the front as you can't usually see the back panel from a playing position. I really like the included gig bag as this offers adequate protection without taking up too much space, and overall The



Cub exudes an air of professionalism. The lack of reverb or a mic input may mean the solo pub performer needing to amplify both guitar and vocals has to budget for an additional small mixer, but the total cost will probably still be less than many of the alternatives.

This is the ideal acoustic guitar amplifier for small venues where the performer needs portability and doesn't need the amplifier to handle vocals. It isn't as loud as some physically larger 100-Watt acoustic amplifiers I've tried but feedback will probably limit your level before the amp does. If you were to use two of them you could run your mixer or electric guitar modelling preamp in stereo which might be a good setup for small gigs where a budget mixer would also let you run backing tracks and additional mics through the system. **mm**

# musicmart

**AAAD Cub £329**

### Key Notes

- Compact acoustic guitar amp.
- 100W.
- 2 x 5-inch drivers.
- 11.5lbs.

### High Notes

- Extremely compact.
- Well balanced sound.
- Surprising level and low end.
- Comes with gig bag.

### Low Notes

- No XLR mic input.
- No reverb or other effects.

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