



BASS COLLECTION SPEAKEASY 4 AND 5

HIGH QUALITY AT AFFORDABLE PRICES? THE BASS CENTRE TRIUMPHS AGAIN, SAYS IAN GLASPER

Bass Centre
www.basscentre.com

With 30 years of experience to bring to bear, satisfying both the legends of British bass playing and the thousands of punters that have poured through their doors since their Wapping shop launched way back in 1984, the London Bass Centre can always be trusted to bring tight quality control and unrivalled value for money to all of its own-brand products. The new Speakeasy range is no exception, seeing a welcome rebirth of the SB ('small bodied') series, which was one of their most popular lines during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

BUILD QUALITY

Pull these new basses from the comfort of their padded Bass Centre gig bags and the first thing you'll notice is how damn cool they look. They're economically sized and super sleek, with the top horn seemingly flowing through the neck and into the bottom horn in one compelling sweep. Secondly, you'll appreciate how light and balanced they feel, an ergonomic dream in fact. You can play these elegant beauties for hours and not really realise you've been playing them, unlike many a slab I've had play havoc with my vertebrae over the years.

The headstock is another talking point. It's understated, shaped a bit like a Tic-Tac, and as well as being practical (you won't take your singer's head off with it) it's totally in keeping with the micro-aesthetic elsewhere. The absence of any sizeable lump of wood at the end of the neck offsets the downsized body and contributes to the Speakeasy's delectable balance. Whether sitting with them on your lap, or slinging them from a strap, both basses are effortless to wield and willing to yield, their rounded edges kind to the forearm, and their chamfered bodies kind to the floating rib.

With the four-string in lustrous 'King Crimson', and the five-string in 'Jet Black', both guitars have been finished with a minimalist flourish. Your reviewer particularly liked the King Crimson, not because of any particular prog leanings, but because it's the same stunning hue as an old guitar once owned that sadly got defaced by a marker pen skull... but that's another story. Just don't look at this in direct sunlight, unless you want a glare migraine.

The necks are firmly fixed with four countersunk bolts, and have an extension into the body for extra stability, which you'll hardly notice because of the neat paint-job and joinery. The generous lower horn cutaway, along with the heel-less neck, makes even the highest notes readily accessible.

The headstock is primed with four closed-gear Gotohesque tuners, neatly back-angled to subtly continue that dynamic design flow, and needless to say they presented no tuning issues whatsoever during the review trial.



There are no forward-facing inlays on the neck, which adds to the confident, workmanlike vibe of the instrument, which definitely punches above its weight in the looks department in this price bracket.

However, there are discreet side dots for your reference, should you ever lose your way in the heat of the moment.

Overall, with regard to build, you're going to have to search long and hard to find anything that niggles you with these basses. Both are solid and sinewy for their size, and boast joints and fittings as tight as their lines.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUNDS

The Speakeasy neck is low profile, and wonderfully soft and smooth in the palm, promoting some speedy manoeuvres up and down its length. The four-string handles like a dream, and while the five-string neck could have been a little narrower, it's still child's play compared to some of the dual carriageways I've battled over a chord with. If it's a quick action you look for in a bass, these will definitely punch your ticket, but the four-string edges it for fretboard dynamism.

Both come equipped with a dual-action truss rod, if you're brave enough to set up your basses yourself... but the Bass Centre can rest

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easy, as your intrepid reviewer felt absolutely no need to get the Allen keys out. The set-up on the trial models was dreamy already.

Matching hardware throughout on each bass, from the machine heads to the chunky bridge, is always a welcome touch, with the four-string in traditionally tasteful chrome, and the five-string in gold, right down to the nut and the screws to the battery compartment.

The active electronics bring the EQ to life, allowing ample tones to be wrung from either bass. As the name suggests, the Speakeasys are lively sounding guitars, with lots of zing to the upper ends, a dynamic snap to the mids and an evocative growl around the lower reaches. Played with a pick, both guitars gave up a tight responsive attack that was both gnarly and flattering; under the fingertips they were equally as pleasing to play, the pick-ups located sympathetically for those that like to rest their thumb on something while laying down their grooves.

The general vibe of the instruments should suit enthusiastic slappers out there as well as rockers: the pickups can certainly handle the rough stuff, with the high mass bridge ensuring powerful sustain for heavier moments.

Those pickups are the Bass Centre's own units from their awesomely-monikered Bass



Invader range, by the way, and with a switch to blend signals, as well as active bass and treble cut and boost, there's plenty of scope at your fingertips. The review models were more than adequately wired for sound with stainless steel Bass Centre Elite Stadium Series strings, and these certainly seemed to suit the guitars, although the five-string struggled a little with the low B to find the same quality and clarity of tone as the higher registers.

CONCLUSION

It seems churlish to try and criticise such high-quality guitars when they're available at these kind of prices, and you're going to have to search long and hard to get a similar bang for such modest buck anywhere else. They even throw in a Bass Collection gig bag, which is a nice touch and functional, well padded with enough straps and handles to carry your guitar whichever way you like, and enough storage pockets for leads, pedals and much more. And that Bass Centre logo always reminds me of my own playing style – all fingers and thumbs! ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

PRICE | £495 (four-string), £595 (five-string)
MADE IN | Korea
BODY WOOD | Ash
FINISH | King Crimson, Jet Black, Two-Tone, Windermere Blue, Walnut
NECK | 3-piece maple
FRETS | 24 jumbo
SCALE | 34"
FINGERBOARD | Rosewood
PICKUPS | Bass Centre Bass Invader
HARDWARE | Chrome (four-string), gold (five-string)
CONTROLS | Master volume, pickup blend, active bass cut/boost, active treble cut/boost

WHAT WE THINK

PLUS | Small and perfectly formed, these guitars are easy on both the eye and the ear
MINUS | Perhaps lacking some of the depth and richness of tone of a weightier, more expensive instrument, but that comes with the territory
OVERALL | Exceptionally well built and finished for the price tag – a joy to play

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★