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BASS COLLECTION

Speakeasy Pro 4

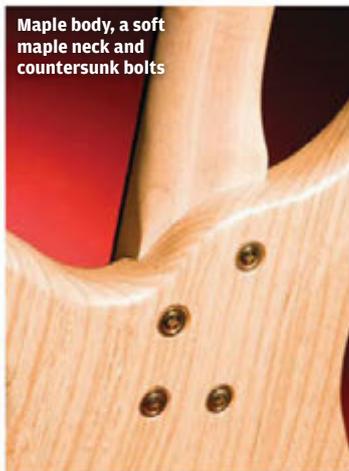
If you rue the proliferation of well-worn '60s designs then you'll welcome the reappearance of the sleek-looking Bass Collection series, and especially this flagship model. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Some of you may remember the original Bass Collection instruments from the late '80s and early '90s. The SB460 series was built in Japan by Nanyo Boeki and distributed in the UK by the Bass Centre from its citadel in Wapping, London. They were sleek - sleeker than a Jazz Bass - and this down-sizing attracted those with shoulder and neck issues who wanted less weight on their support shoulder, and also the smaller in stature, or newcomers to the instrument for whom the accepted Fender-size body was a serious obstacle to playing comfort.

The sleek, up-to-the-minute Bass Collection looks also brought plenty of pro players to the BC party, most notably Nick Fyffe with Jamiroquai and Chris Wolstenholme, who wielded a pair of SB300 Series basses with Muse during the *Showbiz* era, both live and in the studio. Production ceased in the early/mid '90s and the brand lay dormant until it was acquired by House Music - which represented something akin to completion of the circle, House Music being the force behind the now internet-only Bass Centre colossus.

We reviewed the Speakeasy model in our April 2006 issue (Vol 17 No 2), a budget-priced active belter good enough to make it into the top three

Maple body, a soft maple neck and countersunk bolts



G&B basses in Gear Of The Year. A steady trickle of new instruments has continued to flow, most notably the traditionally-appointed Power and Jive models, but this month it's the turn of the swanky new Speakeasy Pro.

There's no mistaking the fact that the Korean-made SP is a rung or two up the ladder, with a sumptuous, tiger-striped walnut top with real richness and depth. When we talk about 'tops' this often indicates wood a couple of millimetres thick, but here you get 8mm of walnut glued to a 30mm chunk of soft maple. Add those together and, naturally, you end up with 38mm, which is 4mm shallower than a Jazz Bass, and



Back-angled gold tuners on a narrow headstock

the body is around 40mm narrower too. The waist has a comfort-inducing ribcage chamfer, while the top horn is sleek and angular and the lower one is a stubbier 'thumbs up' shape with a cutaway deep enough for easy access to the highest frets.

The neck is a three-piece maple affair with an ultra-slim, almost squashed C profile. It's as super-fast in feel as Bass Collection necks always have been (well, it would have been a bit silly to have designed a down-sized bass and then fitted a tree trunk for a neck). Neck and body are held together by a four-bolt retention system, while the heel-less joint increases high-register playing ➔

FACTFILE

Bass Collection Speakeasy Pro 4

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£695**

BUILD **Walnut top on soft maple body with bolt-on three-piece maple neck with 24 medium jumbo nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard. Bass Collection Gotoh-style tuners and Bass Collection Hi-mass Hi-sustain bridge. Gold hardware**

ELECTRICS **Active with one Bass Collection Power Humbucker and one Bass Collection Jive Single Coil. Bass, Treble, Balance and Volume controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, from late 2014**
FINISH **Natural satin**
RANGE OPTIONS **Five-string Speakeasy Pro 5, £895**

SCALE LENGTH **864mm/34"**
NECK WIDTH **Nut 40.5mm**
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK **First fret 20mm**
12th fret 21mm
STRING SPACING **Nut 11mm**
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED **12th fret treble 2.5mm**
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT **3.33kg/7.36lbs**

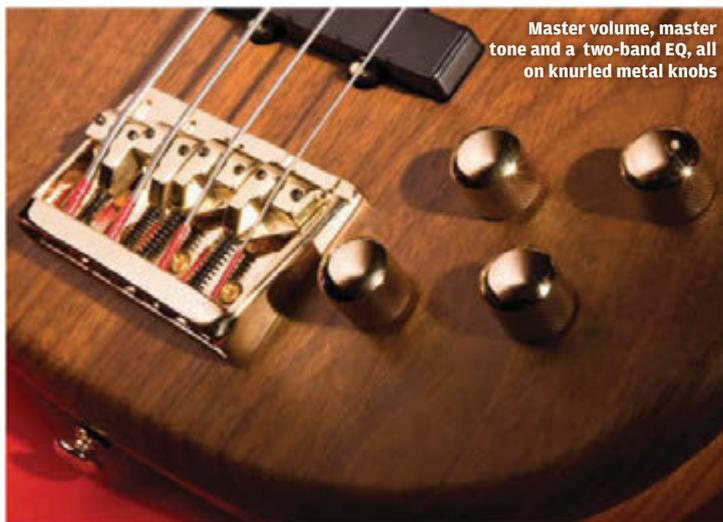
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ESP
 D-4
 A modern active 24-fret bass with a through-neck and a highly practical EQ, with just a touch of Mordor to the headstock
 RRP **£420**

Ibanez
 SR700
 A very nicely-packaged all-rounder with a maple top, a three-band Bartolini EQ and a through-neck. Overall, it's a high quality, versatile workhorse
 RRP **£599**

Traben
 Array Limited
 The massive and showy 'tribal flame' bridge aims the Traben at a certain audience but underneath that it's a good active-powered all-rounder
 RRP **£459**



Master volume, master tone and a two-band EQ, all on knurled metal knobs

The Speakeasy Pro is a bass that should appeal to those for whom Fender-type dimensions are a major obstacle

comfort still further. Both the headstock and the neck at the body are faced walnut; a classy detail.

The headstock is also tiny relative to the big, sprawling monoliths you'll often find atop many a neck; it's almost a lollipop-shape. Plenty of headstock angle creates an excellent break angle for the strings as they pass over the shiny old-school brass nut and onto a classy-looking ebony fingerboard, which carries 24 expertly-seated medium jumbo nickel frets.

Bass Collection has chosen to do away with all front-facing fingerboard markers, but you'll find a row of small white dots along the top edge. Hardware-wise it's a sea of gleaming gold, with four Gotoh-style small-button

closed gear tuners in two up/two down formation on the headstock and a chunky BC Hi-Mass Hi-Sustain bridge.

The Bass Collection brand was born in the active era and of course the Speakeasy follows suit with one split BC Power Humbucker in the neck position and a slim BC Jive Single Coil at the bridge funnelled through a pair of active bass and treble EQ controls, with pickup balance and volume controls completing the picture.

One of the arguments often levelled against smaller-body basses is poor balance but the SP is no more or less stable than many revered and classic basses, and it's a paragon of virtuous stability when slung over your shoulder.

Sounds

Plugging in uncorks a clean, clear sound with a fiercely up-to-the-minute character. There's a pleasing growl at the bottom end and the midrange errs towards the higher end of the spectrum - big on bright and snappy, but lacking a bit in the punch and impact department. The clarity is excellent, but the highs are very affected by the high mid-bias so the SP is a little over-nasal in its basic sound, although, to be fair, there are elements of the fizzy, crystalline sound you'd expect to get from a Stingray.

The Speakeasy delivers a more traditional sound on the neck pickup, with that nasal element reduced dramatically, superseded by a harder-hitting midrange and earthier lows which are certainly bassier but still lack a bit of bottom end. Clarity is still excellent but it feels more under control, and the heavy zing from thinner

strings is overpowered by cleaner, chiming highs that are less brittle and more practical. Switching to the bridge pickup, there's plenty of burp in the tone, plus a lack of bottom end and a surfeit of fizzy zing, but it's not as metallic as the twin-pickup sound.

Engaging the EQ is a fruitful course of action as dialling in extra bass immediately gives the Speakeasy a more weightily authoritative sound, throwing a thick cloak over the lively top end; the zing's still there, but it's no longer the dominant feature. In fact this setting with its smooth midrange and ample fundamentals is as close as you'll get to a scooped mids sound from any bass. Dialling in more treble reclaims much of the edge, recreating the original twin-pickup flat EQ tone but with far more body and drive behind it. On the neck pickup, injecting bass EQ changes the decently earthy tone into a really good and slighter fatter version of the P-Bass type sound, adding authority and growl to the lower strings. It's solid and punchy in the midrange and thinner strings have plenty of substance for melodic excursions. There's a more even, open feel to the highs and if you dial in some treble they open up just a little bit more. In twin mode, hiking treble increases the zingy element and it's a similar story with the neck, although to a lesser degree. These may work in a solo bass context, but not really for the bulk of bass work.

Verdict

Bass Collection's Speakeasy Pro is a well put-together and handsome-looking bass that should appeal to those players for whom Fender-type dimensions are a major obstacle. Tonally, the twin pickup sound is a disappointment - too zingy and with not enough bottom end - but that's compensated for by the clean earthiness and stylistic versatility attained via the soloed humbucker. Perhaps the main issue is the price, as £695 is near the top end for a midrange active, although it's fair to say that its modern good looks and fine playability make it an instrument that many will be happy to pay a little extra for.



The Speakeasy Pro's walnut slab top is a thing of grainy beauty

FINAL SCORE

BASS COLLECTION SPEAKEASY PRO 4	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	14/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	83%