



Barefaced Big Baby II & Big Twin II

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

FOR BETTER OR WORSE (OKAY, MOSTLY worse) bass cabinet design can be roughly divided into two categories. First, there are the manufacturers that essentially take a plywood box, bolt in off-the-shelf Eminence or Celestion speakers, throw in a simple crossover and a chintzy tweeter, and call it a day. This approach can actually work, insofar as there's plenty of free know-how (and easily imitated designs) out there for anyone seeking to make a decent bass cabinet.

On the other side of the spectrum lie the audio engineers who take cabinet and speaker design as seriously as the most skilled luthier or expert amp designer. Generally driven by dissatisfaction with current designs or a visionary solution to an acoustic challenge, these engineers develop their own drivers, test materials, experiment with cabinet shape and baffling, design proprietary crossovers, and more. Alex Claber of Barefaced is one such engineer. For proof, just take a glance around

S SPECIFICATIONS

BAREFACED

Big Baby II & Big Twin II

Street Big Baby II \$1,099;

Big Twin II \$1,599

Pros Detailed and even frequency response; excellent off-axis projection; light; monstrous power handling

Cons None

Bottom line Some of the coolest cabs I've tried in a good long while.

SPECS

Woofers 12" custom-designed 12XN550 neodymium driver(s)

Tweeter Waveguide

Crossover 4th-order

Connector 2 parallel Neutrik dual connectors

Impedance Big Baby II 8Ω; Big Twin II 4Ω

Power handling Big Baby II 1600 watts; Big Twin II 800 watts

Made in England

Contact barefacedbass.com



his website, one of the most well-consolidated resources for speaker and cabinet design concepts and technical information I've come across. And that's just incidental to the fact that he's actually making cabinets. Given his clear fascination and dedication to the task, I was eager to see whether his designs reveal a thoughtful engineer at work.

The Barefaced approach is definitely unconventional. First, rather than stick to tried-and-true configurations and shapes, Barefaced endeavors to make its cabinets as tall as practical for their size. We've all done small gigs with small cabinets where we're shoved into a corner with the woofer hitting our ankles. It's no fun, and it's the source of much trouble trying to balance stage volume. By design, the Barefaced designs give players a better shot at actually hearing themselves onstage. And it's not just the cabs' verticality; it's also their excellent polar response, which refers to the cabs' on- and off-axis projection. That means acoustically accurate sound whether you're standing directly in line with the cab or not.

CARE IN CONSTRUCTION

Our test cabinets demonstrate many of the concepts unique to Barefaced. First, each features Barefaced's proprietary 12XN550 neodymium driver. The result of several years of development, the driver is designed to excuse like a subwoofer (move a lot of air), but with the even midrange response and fast transient response of a PA-style driver. The resulting speaker is a wonder, offering class-leading sensitivity—less power is needed to produce a given volume—plus

high power handling and remarkably even frequency response. In tandem with the new speaker design is a high-frequency driver whose intense development matches that of the woofer.

As a serious cabinet engineer, Claber understands the critical role the enclosure plays in the character and behavior of a speaker cabinet. He feels that the conventional formula—a minimally braced six-sided box made from heavy plywood—was chosen for practical convenience when stacking, rather than sound. To Claber, the magic of his cabinets is due to their thoughtful and extensive perforated bracing and the use of thin-walled plywood. This design eliminates unwanted resonances between parallel internal surfaces and goes a long way toward flattening the cabinets' frequency response. To further augment stiffness, increase low-frequency response, improve stage volume, and maintain optimum driver performance, Claber also put a ton of thought into his port design. For further detail, check out the Barefaced website.

In spite of the deep attention paid to the internal design of its cabinets, Barefaced put just as much




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thought into its cabs' external durability. Each cabinet features a durable textured polymer finish, CNC-cut mounts for the steel grilles, and an attention to detail that includes ensuring that the finish behind the grille and inside the ports is identical to the more visible exterior. In a few months of use, I didn't scratch or ding the cabs noticeably, and their light weight and well-placed handles made each schlep a breeze.

NAKED BASS

Our two testers are like siblings. The Big Baby II is much like the Big Twin II, but it only features one 12" driver. To test the cabs, I paired them with a variety of amps, including an Aguilar DB 750, Kern IP-777/Crest CA-9 rig, Markbass Big Bang, and even an audiophile power amp, the Krell KSA-80B. I also played a healthy amount of Moog SUB 37 synth bass through each, verifying the cabs' capacity to reproduce wall-shaking lows without notable fatigue.

My overall reaction to each cab is that they are capable of mind-numbing volume, but this volume never comes at the expense of a poised and balanced sound. Whether with the Big Baby II or the Big Twin II, the transition from low to high frequencies is smooth and remarkably even. I couldn't get the speakers to break up, no matter how hard I dug in and turned up. Their composure in a variety of settings was stunning. It's confidence inspiring, knowing that no matter how loud I had to be (which, granted, is never as loud as you think when you're on a proper stage with monitors), the speakers wouldn't seem near

their limit. Also, the high-frequency response was a joy. Rather than the brittle, mildly distorted sizzle that a lot of bass cabs seem to crank out, the Barefaced cabs have a graceful and elegant transition into the high register that just seems like a natural continuation of the cabs' deeper response. The more impressive of the two is the Big Baby II, not because it sounds better than the Big Twin II, but because in spite of its size and weight, it easily cranks out the volume of much larger configurations, including some iconic 4x10 designs. The Big Twin II is no less impressive sonically, but it is a good deal larger. I'd be hard-pressed to imagine a setting where it wouldn't suffice on its own.

The Barefaced Audio cabinets are a satisfying exemplar of what happens when an obsessive mind tackles an age-old problem with the spirit of innovation. In what once seemed like a tired corner of the bass market, it's folks like Alex Claber that remind us that improvement is always a possibility. The cabs nail it in pretty much every category; you must check one out. **BP**



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