



Mark Bass MoMark

In its relatively short history Markbass has established itself as a major innovator in bass amp technology and with the release of the MoMark modular system looks set to raise the **bar once more.**

With strong showings at both the Winter NAMM show and the Musikmesse in Frankfurt, Markbass is steadily gaining a loyal following and boasts some pretty high profile endorsees in the likes of Alain Caron, Hadrien Feraud and Michael Manring. The current Markbass product catalogue ranges from the diminutive LittleMark 250 to the popular F1 and SD1200. Further product launches are scheduled for release throughout 2009 and include updates to the LittleMark and SD lines, along with the launch of a new range of effects pedals and software plugins. The latest addition to the Markbass stable is the MoMark modular system, which looks set to become a major innovation in the concept of buying a bass amp. The MoMark gives the consumer complete control over what their amp should be, as company founder, Marco De Virgiliis explains, 'Different players have different priorities and preferences about what features they want their ideal amp to have, so I came up with the idea for the MoMark'

Features

The MoMark starts with a MoMark Amp Frame, which is a compact

black ABS plastic chassis. There are 4 different frames to choose from with either a digital or analog power amp and 250 to 800 watts of power. The Amp Frame houses removable preamp, EQ and output modules that behave like hard drives in a computer. There are 6 preamp 6 EQ and 4 master modules to choose from, each offering a progressive list of features. You can mix and match these modules in any way that you

choose giving you the freedom to create your own sound and change it whenever you want. The retail price of each module is also dictated by its feature set, allowing you to tailor your amp to suit your budget. You could opt for a solid-state or a tube preamp module with single or dual channels paired with a 4 or 7-band graphic or parametric EQ module, or a module that bypasses the EQ entirely. The master modules

range from the MO module, which offers a basic master level control and limiter, to the M2VLFM, which comes complete with the trademark Markbass Vintage Loudspeaker Emulator (VLE) filter, line out control, foot switching capabilities and a new high-tech bi-band limiter. Our review model comprises a 500-watt analog Amp Frame fitted with a T1M Preamp module, an EQ0 EQ module and a MVVL master module. The MoMark needs to have one of each kind of module installed in order to function: one Preamp module, one EQ Module, and one Master Module.

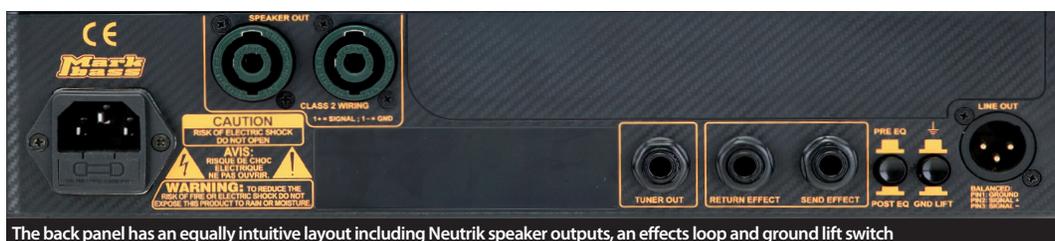
Despite its modular design the MoMark feels reassuringly solid leaving us with little doubts over its durability. The individual modules mount securely into the chassis and can be easily slid in and out. The modules are 'hot swappable', which means you don't need to switch the



The MVVL Master Module features VLE and VPF filters, a bi-band limiter and both master and line out level controls



Each Amp Frame house removable preamp, EQ and Master modules



The back panel has an equally intuitive layout including Neutrik speaker outputs, an effects loop and ground lift switch



MoMark on and off each time you change a module. The Pre T1M preamp module is inspired by the preamp section that's found in the Markbass TA 503 head and features a tube gain section that's designed to offer a warm and clear tube tone without colouring the sound of your bass. The jack input socket is also located here alongside a clip led and mute switch. The EQ0 Module acts like a true-bypass module and contains a simple circuit board, which is designed to offer the flat sound of the MoMark, as Riccardo Damiani of Markbass explains, 'Markbass amplifiers are regularly praised for their true-to-the-source sound, and we are always hearing people say that they never use the EQ knobs on their Markbass amps. In the same way that some people would rather have only a volume knob on their guitar, some people are happy to have no EQ on their amp. It's also a much cheaper option!' The MVVL Master module features Markbass's VLE filter and Variable Preshape Filter (VPF) filter, along with a bi-band limiter, level and line out controls. The VLE is a shelf EQ that allows you to attenuate the high frequencies in the same way you can adjust a horn attenuator on the back of a speaker cab. The VPF acts like an 'enhance' or 'contour' control and boosts the low and high frequency's while cutting the mids. Some may find the control legending a little difficult to see on a dark stage as

the type face is quite small, but this shouldn't cause too many problems given the intuitive layout. The rear panel features 2 Neutrik speakon outputs that accept both Speakon connectors and 1/4 inch speaker cable, a balanced XLR line out, pre/post EQ switch, ground lift, tuner out, and an effects loop.

Sounds

If we had any reservations about how the MoMark might sound based on its compact size and modular design, they were quashed soon after plugging in. The MoMark retains all of the tonal transparency and fast note response that has made existing Markbass lines so popular. The tonal character of your instrument comes through in abundance and remains well balanced making the MoMark instantly gig ready. The T1M preamp module grants access to a little mid range warmth that compliments the focused definition that's already present in both the low and high-end frequencies. It's not designed for distortion and increasing the level too far will activate the clip led. Adjusting the VLE and VPF filters allows you to adapt your bass sound to suit a range of different styles and turning either control fully anti-clockwise will switch the filter off allowing you to gradually introduce them independently or combine the two for some interesting effects. The VLE gives the MoMark a little

more weight and presence in the mid range and is ideal for a dialing in a more traditional tone with less emphasis in the top end, without losing clarity or focus. The VPF acts as a basic contour control, scooping out the mid range and boosting the low and high frequencies to achieve a 'smiley face' EQ curve. While some contour type controls can make the sound boomy and less focussed, we were pleased to find that the VPF lends a natural sounding definition to the top end that's ideal for slap styles and driving rock quavers played with a pick.

Conclusion

The current trend towards compact yet powerful bass amps has made reaping professional tones from a lightweight amp far more achievable, but it's the modular design that scores the MoMark maximum points. Being able to custom order different preamp, EQ and output sections not only allows you to customize your rig for a particular bass, gig, or even a particular song, but as each amp frame and module varies in price according to its features the MoMark effectively allows you to tailor your setup to suit your budget. Markbass will be distributing MoMark Testing Towers to selected Markbass Dealers, which will allow you to compare all the available power and module combinations and hear the difference between the different sections. Given the current financial climate value for money is of increasing importance, but that doesn't necessarily mean looking for the cheapest products. The MoMark offers high build quality and excellent bass sounds in a practical and portable package and its modular design puts you in the driving seat when it comes to determining both its feature set and its price.

Markbass MoMark

Built in: Italy
Amp frame: 500 watt, analog
Price: £650
Features: 2 x Neutrik speakon combo speaker outs, balanced XLR line out, pre/post EQ switch, ground lift, tuner out, FX loop send & return (wired in parallel)
Power output: 500 watts RMS @ 4 ohms/300 watts RMS @ 3 ohms
Preamp module: Pre T1M
Price: £112
Features: Tube preamp, level control, clip led, mute switch
EQ module: EQ0
Price: £48.99
Master module: MVVL
Price: £74
Features: Master level control, balanced XLR line out, Vintage loudspeaker Emulator (VLE) & Variable Pre-Shape Filter (VPF), bi-band limiter
Dimensions: 330(w) x 82(h) x 270(d)
Weight: 3.5 kg (7.7lbs)

What We Think

Plus: Highly portable, well constructed, innovative design & quality bass sounds.
Minus: Having to pay close to £50 for a blank EQ Module
Overall: The MoMark is everything we have come to expect from Markbass and its modular design sets a new standard in what to expect from a bass amp.

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BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

