



## MarkBass MoMark System

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

**AS I'VE POINTED OUT IN NUMEROUS** product reviews, New Gear items, and other product coverage, Italy's Markbass is one of the most ambitious amp manufacturers on the scene. Each year a dizzying pile of new products hit their NAMM show booth, and unlike some manufacturers, Markbass's products often make it to consumers with relative speed. The new MoMark modular amp system is a revolutionary product and another impressive display of engineering prowess from MarkBass.

The basic concept is this: Markbass offers a quartet of power-amp-equipped "Frames," each loaded with either Class AB or Class D power amps, switchmode power supplies, and outputs from 250 to 800 watts. Each two-rackspace-sized frame has three slots for lunchbox-style preamp modules. From left to right, the modules are for the input, EQ, and output controls. The benefits of such a system are clear: a modular amp gives a player the flexibility to dramatically effect their amp's fundamental personality at a relatively low cost without investing in an

entirely new head. The biggest cash outlay is for the amp Frames, which range from \$450 to \$750, depending on power output. The modules, by contrast, are all under \$100.

The MoMark's physical execution was impressive. The Frames are made from a cool quasi-carbon-fiber ABS plastic that seemed tough with a high-end utilitarian look. The rear panel offers the two parallel Speakon outputs, ¼" TUNER OUT, RETURN EFFECT, and SEND EFFECT jacks, an XLR LINE OUT jack and pre/post EQ buttons and ground lift, and an AC jack. A side-mounted fan handles cooling duties. The Frame's front is divided into three empty sections to accommodate the modules. The dividers are a cool orange plastic that illuminates when the amp is turned on, with the two outermost panels flashing when the amp is muted. Each module is easily pushed into its slot, and Markbass includes hardware for more permanent mounting, and shapes the slot so that the module is only installable with the proper vertical orientation. Removal is via a small wire handle placed into two

small holes on each module's front panel. This, to me, is the only design misstep with the MoMark. The handle screams "lose me," it's hard to find the receiving holes in a dark environment, and the ends of the handle easily scratch the module's beautiful gloss-black finish.

Markbass offers an extensive range of modules for the MoMark (I highly recommend going to the ultra-slick [www.momark.it](http://www.momark.it) for a complete list). Our testers included the S1M (solid-state) and T1M (tube) preamp modules, each with GAIN and MUTE controls; the no-filter 0, two-channel shelving/notch S4, and 7-band graphic 7G EQ modules; and, the MVVL "master" module, with mid-scooping VPE, vintage-speaker-emulating VLE, LINE OUT, and MASTER volume controls. These modules offer a nice cross-section of the MoMark's versatile module line-up, but I couldn't help but fantasize about some effect-equipped modules down the line, especially since Markbass recently released a broad line-up of stomptboxes.


Once the modules are in place, the



MoMark works just like any other amp. The interaction with the backlit orange divider panels is particularly cool. There's the aforementioned flashing-when-muted function, but the center dividers also turn on or off with different settings on the S4 EQ.

## SOUND

When testing the MoMark, I was immediately intrigued by the opportunity to test two power amps of nearly identical output but with different topologies. Thus, I installed the same modules in each and went to work, A/B-ing our Class AB Frame 500 and Class D Frame 600. They definitely sounded slightly dissimilar, though some of this could be attributable to their 100-watt output difference. The 500-watt amp was a little less responsive to transients with a more plush and




To remove the MoMark modules, a metal handle is inserted into two holes on the front panel.

bouncy attack. The 600-watt amp was super-quick and laser-sharp. Fans of a moderately more vintage-y tone or of a more contemporary quick attack may

want to consider these differences when shopping for a MoMark system.

The fun continued when I swapped the solid-state S1M module for the 6205-tube-equipped T1M module (the unusual 6205 tube is a subminiature-size pentode). This most definitely made a major sonic difference—the T1M was tube-y indeed, with



Each MoMark module is small, light and designed to mimic the look and feel of Markbass's other amps.

## MOMARK MODULAR AMP SYSTEM

Street Amp Frame 500, \$549; Amp Frame 600, \$649; SIM, \$69; TIM, \$99; EQO, \$49; EQS4, \$89; MVVL, \$89

Pros Revolutionary flexibility

Cons Module removal method needs improvement

## TECH SPECS

Power rating Amp Frame 500, 500 watts @ 4Ω; Amp Frame 600, 600 watts @ 4Ω

Tone controls Vary with module type  
DI output XLR w/ ground lift, pre/post-EQ switch, and level control

Power amp topology Amp Frame 500, Class AB; Amp Frame 600, Class D

Power supply Switchmode

Weight Amp Frame 500, no modules, 7.5 lbs; Amp Frame 600, no modules, 7.3 lbs; when installed, modules add approx. 1 lb

Made in Italy

Warranty Two years



# SOUNDRoom

MarkBass

gutsy and colorful mids and a furriness that increased significantly with high gain settings. I could see a big benefit to buying both the solid-state and tube versions, depending on need. The EQ modules also performed as expected, with the S4 offering perhaps the most bang-for-buck with its twin sets of filters blendable via a small switch. When in MIX mode, the S4 boosted volume significantly—this would be an even cooler feature if it were footswitchable (as would the preamp module MUTE, come to think of it) although that'd undoubtedly add to the MoMark's complexity and price. I especially dug the EQ 0 module, which is basically a no-EQ place-holder. A sonic purist would surely appreciate the visual and electrical simplicity.

I only received the most full-featured of the Master modules, and it performed predictably and admirably on gigs and rehearsals. I've long enthused about Markbass's proprietary VLE control, which I



always think of as a passive tone control for the amp. The MVVL module also incorporates Markbass's cool bi-band limiter for transparent signal taming.

It's exceptionally challenging to sum up the MoMark's sound without diving into the complexity of multiple module combinations. I have a lot of experience with their other products, however, so I can safely say that the MoMark is unmistakably a Markbass amp, most especially in its sweet and supple midrange voice. Power output was never an

issue, either. Both MoMark frames were plenty loud for every stage I put them on.

The MoMark was super cool and it seemed like a well thought-out platform for even more coolness down the line. Considering the system's overall portability and light weight, I began to fantasize about a half-sized MoMark with just two modules, or one with smaller slots for effects. The progressive thinking behind the product inspires such reveries. Kudos to Markbass for continuing to explore the possible. **BP**