

EASTWOOD Club Bass EUB-1 Airline MAP & Classic 4

BY JONATHAN HERRERA



Club Bass



Classic 4



AS BASS PLAYERS, WE SHARE A DESIRE to make good music—art, even—but our tools and philosophies for achieving it are broad. Some feel a bass should be transparent in the creative process, a barrier-free tool for self-expression. But others think a bass's personality is itself an inspirational springboard, and that it should be embraced, not factored out.

There's no doubt which side is winning nowadays, as CNC machines, hi-fi electronics, and simple evolution have created a much less eccentric landscape than back in the bass's early days. For the other side, I say "Right on!" to Eastwood Guitars, whose mission is to pay tribute to funky instruments that are now out of production, rare, and often nearly unplayable. Eastwood underscores the "tribute" aspect of its mission, as the company unabashedly seeks to apply modern materials and construction

techniques to enhance the original instruments' playability and durability—qualities the old, weird instruments weren't known for. In other words, Eastwood basses aren't exact copies, but they come close in most of the important ways.

CLUB BASS

There's no doubt where Eastwood sought inspiration for its Club Bass: the Hofner Club Bass 500/2, originally produced in 1963. It's basically a single-cutaway version of Paul McCartney's "violin" bass, so unless you just woke up from a 45-year coma, you know how it's supposed to sound: fat, warm, and slightly out of tune.

The Eastwood Club Bass is built fairly well for the price, and it definitely nails the original's look. Sure, I could nigger over the slightly sloppy fingerboard binding and annoyingly

buzzy pickguard, but a must-mention annoyance is the mislabeled switch plate. The quirky Hofner-style electronics include both volume knobs, a RHYTHM/SOLO tone switch, and on/off switches for each pickup, and, as on the Hofner, my tester's switches were labeled backwards. Confusing at first, but I got used to it.

The Club Bass is a blast to play and sounds fantastically huge and old-fashioned. Its headstock dives like a binging egret, but it's so light that holding it up isn't a significant strain. It sounds honky and mean or tubby and plush, and it looks cool as hell. Basically, if you want

CLUB BASS

Street \$630

Pros Decent construction; McCartney-esque thud

Cons Confusing controls; nasty neck dive

Bottom line If you want a Hofner and don't want to spend *beaucoup*, get this.



Airline MAP



EUB-1

**TECH SPECS****CLUB BASS**

Weight 5 lbs
Scale length 30½"
Body Laminated maple with flame-maple top
Neck Set maple
Fingerboard Rosewood
Nut Plastic
Pickups Mini humbuckers
Controls Bridge volume, neck volume, pickup on/off switches, rhythm/solo tone switch
Colors Sunburst, black
Made in China

CLASSIC 4

Weight 8 lbs
Scale length 30½"
Body Laminated maple with flame-maple top
Neck Set maple
Fingerboard Rosewood
Nut Plastic
Pickups Mini humbuckers
Controls Bridge volume, neck volume, tone, 3-way pickup switch
Colors Orange, walnut
Made in China

AIRLINE MAP

Weight 8 lbs, 8 oz
Scale length 30½"
Body Chambered mahogany
Neck Bolt-on maple
Fingerboard Rosewood
Nut Plastic
Pickups Hot-10 Alnico humbuckers
Controls Bridge volume, neck volume, tone, 3-way pickup switch
Colors Black, seafoam green, white
Made in Korea

EUB-1

Weight 7 lbs, 8 oz
Scale length 34"
Body Mahogany
Neck Bolt-on maple
Fingerboard Rosewood
Nut Plastic
Pickups Eastwood Alnico humbucker
Controls Volume, tone
Colors Sunburst, black
Hardware Grover-style
Made in Korea

CLASSIC 4**Street** \$1,000**Pros** Sweet old-fashioned looks; solid tone**Cons** Poorly designed bridge doesn't grab E string well**Bottom Line** The bridge needs work, but otherwise she's a beaut.

from the early '60s. There ain't much to it—just a semi-hollow body, a couple of humbuckers, and instant Nashville looks.

The Classic 4 sounds thick, thuddy, and warm, but—true to form—it uses the same questionable old bridge design as an original Gretsch or Hofner, with fretwire as a saddle material. It simply did not want to hang on to the E string. Every moderately strong pluck flung it from its precarious perch, causing it to wrap around the side of the bridge in ever-more-annoying indignation. (Thinking it was likely due to a production error, Eastwood sent another bridge that worked perfectly.) What I could make of the E string (and the rest of the strings for that matter) was positive—it sounded like a short-scale booty-machine should.

AIRLINE MAP

If this seafoam-green bit of kitsch doesn't appeal to you, let's not go out to dinner. Eastwood nailed it with the Airline MAP, a tribute to the fiberglass National Newport guitar, originally released in 1962. If you haven't guessed what the "MAP" stands for, look at the photo and squint.

There's a lot of super-cool details on the Airline MAP, like the white-capped headstock, '50s-diner script, Deco pickguard, and funky knobs. The test instrument's construction was decent, with nothing major to call its long-term viability into question. The MAP was heavier than I expected, but this worked to its advantage, as its short-scale neck wasn't as prone to dive as the others. In keeping with the original's '60s-era electronic nuttiness (what other decade had as many "why not" designs?), the MAP has both a volume/volume/tone setup and a pickup switch—great for turning one

AIRLINE MAP**Street** \$1,000**Pros** Majorly cool-looking; surprisingly versatile assortment of tones**Cons** Did I mention how cool-looking it is?**Bottom Line** A frivolity to be sure—but c'mon, in seafoam green this is sure to please.

pickup off and frantically flipping the switch back-and-forth for tremolo crazy-times.

For some reason, the MAP doesn't sound nearly as weird as it looks. I was shocked to discover some legitimately sizzly high end, controlled mids, and thick bottom, not just goofy midrange *plonk*. If you can deal with the chunky in-the-way pickups, the MAP is actually capable of reasonably righteous slap tones, and with the bridge pickup soloed, it's punchy, funky, and precise. Digging in is especially cool, as the MAP grits its teeth and sounds like it looks: gross, but in a good way.

EUB-1

Full disclosure: In anticipation of the Eastwoods' arrival, this was the instrument I was most excited about. There's something cool about the Ampeg AUB "scroll" basses that the EUB is based on, so the chance to actually play something like an AUB was thrilling, since the originals are scarce and expensive. In a way, the EUB-1 was the most and least disappointing of the bunch. Compared to the original, which brought beefy bass to a new level of carnal nastiness, the EUB-1 is lean, bass-shy, and, well, normal. But as a straightforward fretless, the EUB-1 is actually quite useful, and it deliv-

EUB-1**Street** \$900**Pros** Sweet looks; good playability; solid, if unexciting, fretless tone**Cons** Sounds nothing like the original Ampeg AUB**Bottom Line** A left-of-center-looking fretless that sounds decidedly middle-of-the-road.

ers its utilitarian fretless tone in an undoubtedly groovy package. It just isn't that funky.

Construction, as with the others, was just okay. I love the bass's look, though, and Eastwood did a good job of evoking the original without going full-bore, although it is missing the Ampeg's distinctive scrolled headstock and quirky Baby Bass-style "mystery" pickup. The EUB's playability is good, in part because its 34" scale and nice balance make it feel more conventional than its shorter-scale line-mates. The sound is rather narrow in scope, but what it does offer is compelling and useful: a midrangy fretless tone with hearty *mwah* and, with the tone knob rolled off, enough guts to support a band on a fluffy pillow. **BP**

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