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Ultrasound CP-100 Amplifier

A rugged, feature-laden amp that brings active-pickup guitars to life with power, clarity, and definition.

by Shawn Hammond

It's been seven years since Ultrasound Amplifiers' Dan Gore and Greg Farres dipped their toes into the acoustic-amp waters with the introduction of the AG-50—a compact, well-appointed amp that found lots of fans among acoustic players aching to plug in. Over the years, Ultrasound has unveiled many models that follow a similar mindset—lots of options in an easy-to-schlep package—and that come in varying wattages, speaker complements, and connection options to please everyone from open-mic mavens to band dudes seeking more oomph.

One of the company's more popular models is the AG-50DS3, a 50-watt, two-channel box with two eight-inch coaxial drivers (standard speakers with



At a Glance

Ultrasound CP-100

HIGHLIGHTS	Punchy tones. Simple operation. Flexible connection options.
THE SPECS	One eight-inch driver with a coaxial "supertweeter." Two channels with independent two-band EQ (bass and treble). Double-duty XLR/instrument cable input for each channel. Notch filter and Shape toggles (channel two). Fifteen digital effects (assignable to either or both channels) with Level control. Master volume. Quarter-inch footswitch, effect-loop (serial), and line-out jacks. XLR direct out. RCA inputs. Miniature auxiliary-input volume control. 12 x 16 x 11 inches. 30 pounds. Made in US.
WATCH FOR	Low input gain. No mid-frequency controls.
THIS IS COOL	Classy looks and beefy construction. Controls and connections are easy to reach and identify from playing position.
BEST FOR	Acoustic players looking to add tonal control and DI output to instruments with active electronics.
PRICE	\$978 list/\$699 street.
MAKER	Ultrasound Amplifiers, (888) 308-1557, www.ultrasoundamps.com .

RAY LAUSEN

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dome tweeters where the dust caps would normally be). But recent developments and trends within guitar-dom have prompted Ultrasound to tweak their recipe. The result is the new CP-100, a two-channel amp with the same control topology as the AG-50DS3, but with 100 watts driving a single coaxial speaker. "Guitarists really want smaller, more affordable amps these days," says Gore, "but with more horsepower."

BURLY AND EASY TO USE

Despite its mini profile, the CP-100 feels Herculean; everything from its thick rubber feet to its metal corner protectors,

3/4-inch plywood cabinet, 16-gauge folded-steel chassis, and stitched-leather luggage handle indicates that it can take a lot of kicking around. The faux-leather covering matches the vibe of most acoustic guitars, and the brown-and-black grille cloth looks like it came from a vintage Fender "brownface" amp. The controls couldn't feel sturdier: the power switch and miniature toggles give reassuring clicks when activated (and don't move easily when bumped), the jacks and heavy-duty control pots are all chassis mounted for durability, and the knobs feel as solid as any I've ever encountered.

Another cool thing is how the CP-100 squeezes such nice sounds out of relatively few controls. Each channel has volume, bass, and treble knobs, while channel two adds a Shape on/off toggle (which cuts 5 dB of midrange at 1.5 kHz and boosts 100 Hz and 3 kHz by 5 dB each) and a notch-filter toggle and knob that let you cut a frequency between 100 and 350 Hz by 18 dB to control feedback. (The notch knob on our test model was inexplicably labeled "00" and "0" at its extremes, but Dan Gore says this snafu has since been corrected.) The master section has master-volume, effect-mode, and effect-level knobs, as well as a power indicator and a three-way toggle for assigning effects to either or both channels.

Besides its simplicity, the CP-100 gets high marks for ergonomics and convenience: the top-mounted controls are easy to reach and their big, white-lettered labels are easier to read under dim lighting than standard amp labels.

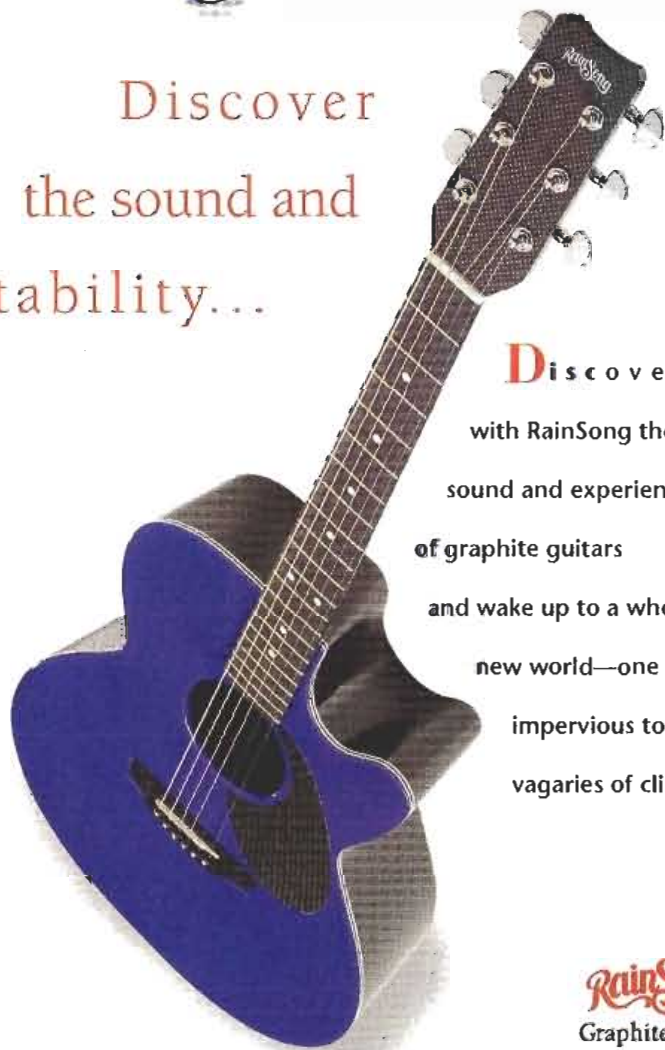
GREAT FOR ACTIVE ELECTRONICS

We tested the CP-100 with several guitar and pickup types. A Taylor 712c with a D-TAR Timberline and Seymour Duncan Mag Mic Taylor sounded the most three-dimensional and organic, possibly due to its dual-source electronics, while an Ovation LX Custom Elite (reviewed on page 26) bloomed with crisp, wonderfully balanced and transparent tones. Similarly, a Godin Multiac had enough output to kick the CP-100 into high gear and highlight the amp's strength—bringing active-pickup guitars to life with power, clarity, and definition.

Conversely, a Durango B-46 dreadnought with a Dean Markley ProMag Gold soundhole pickup was mid- and bass-heavy, and its somewhat weak signal required maxing the channel and master volumes just to hear the amp over the guitar (doing so introduced significant amounts of noise, too). The other guitars had much more volume than the ProMag-equipped ax, but if your ax has a weak-to-moderate signal it might have a hard time hanging with a drummer or several jam buddies without a beefy preamp between it and the CP-100. To test whether the Ultrasound simply needed more preamp gain, we ran the Taylor into a Rane AP13 preamp and

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got punchier tones that helped the amp develop its full potential.

Tonally, my main complaint with the CP-100 is that it doesn't have midrange controls that would let you reduce the nasal quality of some pickups. I was able to overcome this limitation somewhat by engaging the scooped-mid Shape circuit, turning down the bass, and increasing the treble a bit. The well-voiced treble knob was also great for reining in bright pickups or adding life to passive rigs.

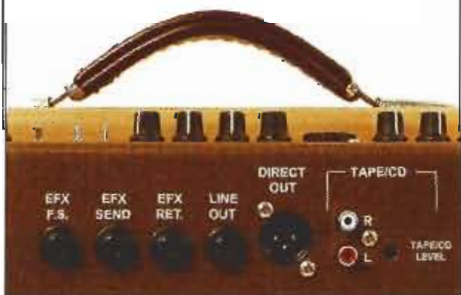
On the effects side, the "warm hall reverb" was lush and comfy for all-around playing and I found myself leaving it on most of the time, with the effects-level (mix) knob at noon, or so. Unfortunately, the chorus, rotary-speaker, flanger, and auto-wah effects were so mild—even when cranked—that they got lost when playing with others. (Another quirk: the effect-mode knob almost completely obscures the preset numbers printed around its

The CP-100 manages to squeeze a variety of nice sounds out of relatively few controls.

perimeter.) However, I totally dug the fact that you can assign effects to either or both channels.

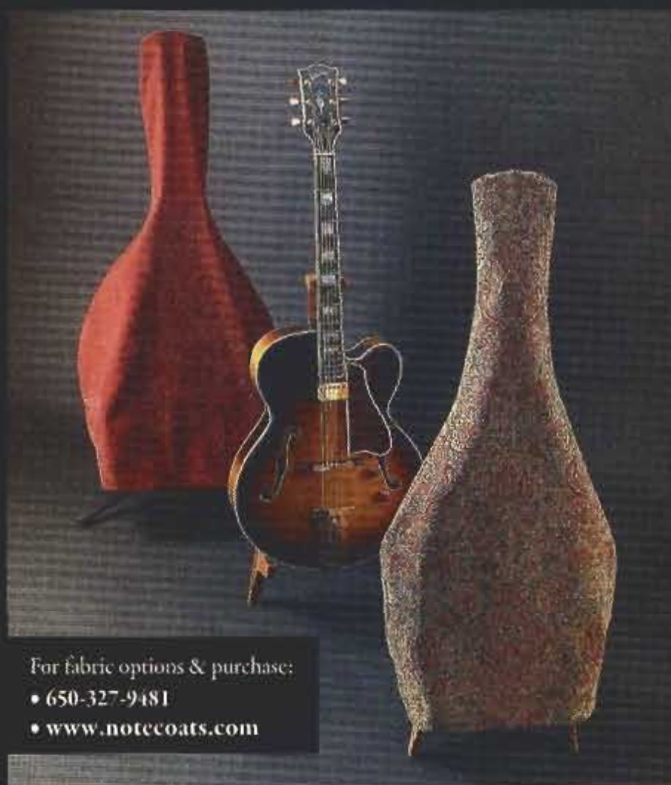
THE WRAP

The Ultrasound CP-100 may not be for everyone. If your guitar has a so-so preamp and you want to simply grab an amp and go to a loud jam, it may not be the best choice. However, if your ax sports a strong signal or your rig includes a robust preamp, the CP-100 will, with great aplomb, transparently broadcast lovely, full-bodied tones to your eager listeners. ■



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