

GEAR BOX

B-52 Stealth ST-100A

Shock and Awe

By Douglas Baldwin

The B-52 is a long-range bomber known for its longevity, performance, and adaptability. The Stealth Bomber is a radical aircraft similarly praised for its striking efficiency. Both are thoroughly capable of administering shock and awe to the world. So when an under-the-radar manufacturer introduces a guitar amp named for these bombing behemoths, we expect it to deliver on all fronts.

LOOKS THAT KILL

With the flame silhouette of its brushed-metal front panel, the B-52 Stealth head can certainly push the buttons of power-hungry metalheads. Industrial hex-head screws and a no-nonsense array of knurled chrome knobs amplify the head's aggressive vibe. Although looks can be deceiving—the knobs are plastic, not chrome-plated brass—the B-52 Stealth proves to be well built both inside and out.

Behind the flames are quality Sovtek tubes, neatly bundled wiring, and a minimal amount of silicone putty (there to dampen the grill). Tech-heads will appreciate that no silicone was used inside the chassis. The supplied footswitch will withstand countless stomps from your Doc Martens, and although its use of two separate wires seemed a little questionable, their 16' length is certainly gig-friendly. Granted, the highest-priced tube amps might

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eschew the B-52 Stealth's board-mounted pots and tube sockets, but the overall construction is so solid that the chance of internal damage over time seems remote.

TONE TO DIE FOR

The Clean channel is warm and round, with loads of headroom, and thus its response is ideal for single-coil pickups.

That said, the amp remains unclouded when pushing humbuckers. As the Clean channel's volume approaches the 12:00 mark, a hint of Brit-like grit emerges in the high midrange. The reverb sounds excellent at low volume but begins to get a little bumpy as you crank the amp.

The Overdrive channel immediately announces itself as a modern-voiced, high-gain beast, generating the thick bottom and hot highs typical of modern

metal. The tone controls of both the Clean and Overdrive channels are similarly voiced: the Bass works evenly through its entire sweep, the Midrange adds subtle warmth, and the Treble becomes extremely active in its final quarter-turn of rotation. (Interestingly, turning all three tone controls fully counterclockwise turns off the sound.) A rear-mounted knob for Rectifier/Class chooses between solid-state (the tightest response), Tube AB1 (middle ground), and Tube A (the loosest, roundest response). With two Gain controls available by footswitch, the B-52 Stealth functions as a virtual three-channel amp. Gain 2 has an additional Contour control that dips the midrange frequencies for an even more exaggerated tonal contour.

The LG-412V cabinet that came with our review model was a brilliant match. Loaded with B-52-branded speakers boasting massive magnets, the rear-ported cabinet felt tight and punchy when dealing with Tool-flavored riffs like the one shown here. The cab's slightly dark tonal coloration may have added to the Clean channel's smoky character, but it seemed a perfect match for the hot 'n' bothered highs of the Overdrive settings. The B-52 Stealth is indeed a powerful and smartly designed unit, worthy of comparison with the finest tube amps.

CONTACT B-52, 800-344-4384, b52pro.com



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Moderately

N.C.

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FEATURES POWER 100 watts via four 6L6 tubes **FRONT PANEL** Headphones/Line out, Master Volume, Master Reverb; Clean and Overdrive channels with Volume, Bass, Middle, and Treble; Overdrive channel also has Gain 1, Gain 2, and Gain 2 Contour controls **BACK PANEL** Adjustable Line Out; adjustable Effects Send and Return; Gain/Channel and Reverb footswitch jacks; speaker impedance switch; 4, 8, and 16-ohm speaker outputs; three-setting rectifier switch **SPEAKER CABINET** LG-412V 4×12 with B-52-branded speakers **PRICE** ST-100A head, \$1299.99; LG-412V cabinet, \$649.99