

MESA Walkabout Scout

TECH SPECS



You can remove the Scout's back panel and use the WalkAbout head without the cabinet.

Pros: Bountiful bottom end; exceptional portability for the power; removable head.

Cons: No mute switch; difficult-to-access rear panel.

Contact: (707) 778-6565; www.mesaboogie.com

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

WE bass players are obsessed with weight. Muscle-bound masochists aside, our bulky instruments and oft-bulky amps give us an acute case of pound-preoccupation. That's why gear that doesn't sacrifice tone for portability is bound to excite. Luckily, our dietary diligence is now paralleled by the advent of new

technologies—like lightweight neodymium speakers and svelte high-tech power amps—that help our gear shed the pounds. The Mesa WalkAbout Scout combines Mesa's 13-pound WalkAbout head with a cleverly designed neo-speaker-equipped 1x12 cabinet, resulting in an incredibly stout-sounding and lightweight gigger's delight.

Even though Mesa designed the Scout to be an all-in-one combo, the WalkAbout head can be easily removed from the cabinet by unscrewing the back plate. This is an excellent feature, as some combos that seemingly integrate heads

Mesa utilizes a passive radiator in the Scout to help extend the cabinet's low-frequency response. A passive radiator is simply a speaker without a magnet and voice coil. When placed in a cabinet that also contains an active driver, passive radiators behave similarly to standard ports in that they extend a cabinet's low-end tuning. Since passive radiators are relatively small, they take up less space than a lengthy cabinet port. Passive radiators' few disadvantages are their complexity compared to ports and their need, in some circumstances, for horizontal orientation. When a passive radiator is oriented vertically, its loose suspension can cause it to sag and reduce its effectiveness.

Power rating:

300 watts into 4 Ω

Input impedance: 1M Ω

passive, 10k Ω active
(w/10dB attenuation)

Tone controls: BASS: \pm 20dB

@ 55Hz, shelving; MID: passive cut @ 600Hz; TREBLE: \pm 20dB @ 723Hz, shelving

3-BAND SEMI-PARAMETRIC EQ:

\pm 15dB @ Band 1:
30Hz–300Hz; band 2:
200Hz–2kHz; band 3:
1.2kHz–12kHz

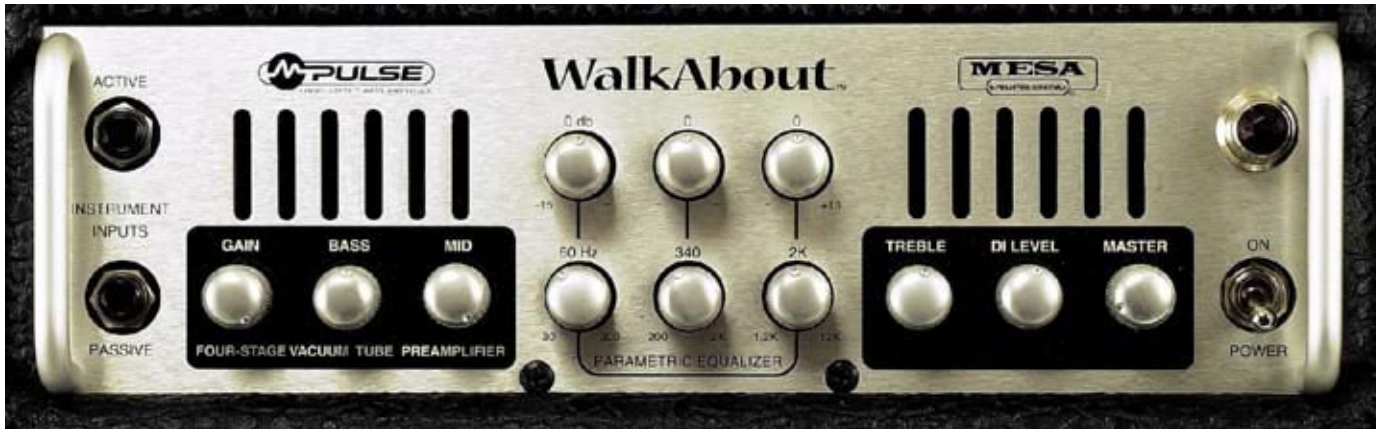
Dimensions: 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

Weight: 50 lbs

Speakers: Mesa-designed neodymium speakers with dynamic tweeter

Made in: U.S.A.

Warranty: Five years limited



The front-panel DI LEVEL knob is conveniently located for adjusting your level in the house PA.



The 34-pound Scout extension speaker utilizes the same drivers as the combo, including the passive radiator for extended low-end response.



Neodymium speaker magnets can, if not adequately heatsinked and ventilated, lose magnetic strength when subjected to their voice coils' high temperatures. To dissipate heat, the Scout's 12" neodymium driver has heat sinks on the rear motor assembly and is vented through the front, as shown here.

cabinets actually do away with the head's top panel, making it impossible to use the head separately. After the simple removal procedure, a close inspection of the head revealed admirable attention to detail. The brushed stainless-steel front panel exudes functional elegance. Each of the knurled knobs feels rugged and rotates smoothly, although I prefer center-detent-equipped boost/cut pots. The front-panel's vents are important for heat dissipation, but since the WalkAbout is pointed skyward when installed in the cabinet, they could function as unintentional spilled-drink drains. The robust power switch and big power light complete the Scout's well-laid-out front panel. Other exterior highlights include a side-mounted handle and a ground-lift-enabled DIRECT OUTPUT.

The WalkAbout's interior construction was skillfully accomplished, using high-quality components. Like its bigger brother, the M-Pulse 600 head (reviewed April '03), the WalkAbout's pots use flying leads linked to a preamp board that spans the amp's width. One 12AX7 tube powers the preamp's tone section while another drives the head's six power-amp MOSFETs. The WalkAbout's toroidal transformer is another high-quality component that improves tone and saves weight. Well-designed toroidal transformers can be magnetically and acoustically quieter than conventional EI transformers, plus they weigh less.

The Scout's tone shaping is derived from Mesa's fuller-featured M-Pulse 360 and 600 amps. The three bands of shelving EQ are appropriately voiced. The BASS and TREBLE controls offer up to 20dB of broadband cut and boost, but the MID control is passive and only cuts. The broad-range semi-parametric EQ covers nearly the entire frequency spectrum. It's a powerful tone sculptor, and Mesa includes extensive information on using it in the owner's manual. The GAIN knob is another important sonic tool. Instead of recommending it as a volume control, Mesa flaunts its potent impact on harmonic rich-

ness and warmth. Indeed, since the GAIN knob changes the amount of tube saturation, different settings result in remarkably different sounds. With a '78 Fender Precision Bass, I preferred setting it in the 12:00-2:30 range, because of that setting's warmth, roundness, and slight grit.

The Scout's cabinet is constructed from dense 11-ply Baltic Birch and is well reinforced. An L-pad at the base of the cabinet's rear panel controls the dynamic-diaphragm tweeter's level. Unfortunately, it's hard to reach. To enhance low-frequency response, the Scout employs a passive radiator. Since passive radiators mimic ports' cabinet-tuning functions without ports' space-gobbling design, they can allow relatively small cabinets to reproduce surprisingly big low end (see Tech Specs). A 1/4" speaker cable is integrated into the cabinet. You'll never have to worry about leaving it at home—but if it breaks, the intrusive and costly repair would make you wish it had a separate-speaker-cable design.

For a 300-watt combo, the WalkAbout is astoundingly portable. The top-located handle was all I needed as I trudged to and from gigs and rehearsals. It's no featherweight, but considering its ample power and room-filling tone, it's close. I also appreciated the included cover, which includes a cut-out for the handle.

Lookout Below

I took the Scout on numerous rock, funk, and folk gigs. Its awesome portability was a welcome relief from my typically heavy rigs. It was small enough to fit in the front seat of my hatchback—a godsend, since my upright occupied the entire rear on a few occasions. On the gig, I noticed the Scout lacked a few features I appreciate, like a mute switch and a tuner jack. Also, since the WalkAbout head is oriented vertically, the rear-panel jacks are difficult to access, particularly on a darkened stage.

Since the WalkAbout head is so easy to

Mesa continued

remove, using it without the Scout cabinet for larger gigs is a major part of the combo's appeal. In our Soundroom, I played the WalkAbout head through a variety of cabs, including an Aguilar GS410 4x10 cab, an Eden D410XLT 4x10, and an Ampeg BXT210M 2x10. With each cab, the WalkAbout proved itself to be a loud and capable performer, particularly with a 4 Ω speaker load. With the 4x10s, the Mesa's sizeable volume would be sufficient for all but the biggest club stages.

With the head reattached, the Scout pumps out serious low end. It's shocking how much bass the tiny box emits. Even with the onboard EQ flat, the Scout's bountiful booty is extreme. The 12" driver stayed coherent and focused, even with aggressive *B*-string attacks. The mids have a pleasing, vocal quality. On fingerstyle funk tunes with an F-Bass BN5 or the '78 P-Bass, I dug the Scout's solid punch and pliable dynamic sensitivity. The preamp behaves like more tube-filled designs: It's musical and responsive, with a pleasant bit of overdrive when pushed to its limits. The tweeter doesn't "spit" like some; it's not abrasive or unpleasant.

Adding the optional 4 Ω extension cab ups the Scout's power output and moves more air. The result? Enough volume, headroom, and booty to fill even medium-size clubs. With both tweeters on, the tone was too trebly for my taste, so I preferred to fully attenuate the extension cab's tweeter. For deep, soulful R&B sounds, I boosted the BASS control and cut the highs with the semi-parametric EQ. To find unwanted frequencies, I swept through each parametric range until I found the spot that needed reduction, and then I cut it with its powerful gain knob.

The Scout works particularly well with upright. Its compact size is a blessing, and its low-end girth is a great match for the doghouse. With my pre-war German plywood, equipped with a Fishman Full Circle pickup, I really began to appreciate the Scout's tone sculptability. I was able to reduce feedback and howl to nil with the broad-ranged semi-parametric EQ.

Mesa's WalkAbout Scout blends timeless, bottomy tone with contemporary innovations that save weight. Though it's no bigger than some practice amps, it's a serious piece of gear that's capable of satisfying the discerning professional. If size matters to you, do yourself a favor and take the Scout for a walk. **BP**