

UltraSound Pro-250

Power and tone-shaping potential in a combo amp that's ready for band gigs and a variety of venues.

By Charles Saufley

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Building any amp that satisfies the acoustic-guitar tone hound is no mean feat. The challenge of designing an amp suited for every player—from transparency obsessives to pop rockers playing club gigs—seems downright insurmountable. Yet that was the design motivation behind UltraSound's latest combo amp. The Pro-250 not only includes all the tone-tweaking

functions a coffeehouse fingerstylist could ever want, it has plenty of power and effects for the acoustic picker who needs to rise above the din of drums, voice, and electric instruments; and for the jack-of-all trades singer-guitarist, it's a capable all-in-one amplifier and PA.

VERSATILITY AND FAMILIARITY

UltraSound had built a reputation for quality and tone over the course of a decade before being bought by Dean Markley in 2007, and it remains a favorite of dedicated

acoustic players. So it's not surprising that the company applied its expertise to a combo amp powerful and versatile enough to suit every acoustic guitarist. For all its versatility, however, the Pro-250's design tends toward simplicity. Apart from its size, there are few overt differences between the Pro-250 and other UltraSound amps. Visually and in its control layout, it borrows from Leo Fender's narrow-panel electric guitar amplifiers of the 1950s. The construction is rock-solid, and the stainless-steel corner bumpers and sturdy jacks and switches suggest a pro-level roadworthiness.

The recessed and top-mounted control set is accessible and easy to navigate. Almost any control you'd want to tweak on the fly is clearly labeled and easy to reach. The

only exception is the 16-position effects selector. With so many numbers grouped around a small dial, it's hard to know which effect you've selected even in good light, let alone a dim club.

TRIAMPED TONE SHAPING

One reason for the Pro-250's relative heft (40 lb.) is its triamped, three-speaker array designed for maximum tone-shaping capability, and its virtues were clear the first time I used it for a high-volume band jam. Playing a RainSong equipped with a Fishman Prefix preamp and piezo pickup and a Martin D-28 with a Dean Markley ProMag soundhole pickup, I had more than enough power to cut through the mix during all but the most rowdy jams. The onboard Eminence "supertweeter"—designed to enhance the amp's overall tonal spectrum and to accent highs—has its own volume control, enabled by active crossover circuitry, that helped me cut through



Logically laid out controls are easy to tweak on the fly.

AT A GLANCE

UltraSound Pro-250

THE SPECS	Two channels. 250 watts triamped with active crossover (150 watts to main driver, 50 watts to midrange speaker, 50 watts to tweeter). Mic/line channel with XLR and ¼-inch inputs. Fifteen Alesis DSP effects including eight reverbs, two delays, and five modulation effects. DI for output to PA. One ten-inch Eminence speaker, one four-inch midrange speaker, and one Eminence "supertweeter." 40 lb. Made in USA.
THIS IS COOL	Horn volume function helps you boost high-end volume in a crowded stage mix.
WATCH FOR	Effects selector is hard to use in low light.
PRICE	\$1,399 list/\$999 street.
MAKER	UltraSound Amplifiers: ultrasoundamps.com ; (888) 993-5091.

bass-heavy mixes and added presence and attack to flatpicked sections and shimmer to arpeggios.

Like any acoustic amp, the Pro-250 was prone to feedback at higher volumes, particularly when I was playing the RainSong—and I spent a bit of time tinkering with the amp's notch filter, bass controls, and master volume once I had dialed in workable preamp settings on the guitar. Once there, however, the UltraSound did a superb job of capturing the detailed high end and sustain of the RainSong/Fishman combination. The Martin/soundhole-pickup combination took a little less work to dial in, due to the lower output of the passive pickup. And with this setup, the UltraSound notch filter seemed more responsive. With tone controls set flat and the tweeter volume just past the midway mark, the Pro-250 did a fine job of conveying the Martin's woody warmth and enhancing the soundhole pickup's flatter, less-detailed output while adding little perceptible color of its own.

The onboard Shape switch engages a preset, scooped-midrange EQ setting and would be useful for low-volume vocal accompaniment and other instances where a less-aggressive guitar mix is vital. But I

preferred the more natural tones achieved by dialing in my own settings on the fly, and I was able to produce a very accurate and wide-spectrum acoustic image that captured the nuances of flatpicking passages and the overtones of modal drones in C and D tunings.

At home in a quieter setting, I preferred to set the amp more or less flat, dial the master volume about a third of the way up, and set the tweeter just past halfway. At lower volume it was difficult to drive the ten-inch speaker enough to

The Pro-250's virtues were clear the first time I used it for a high-volume band jam.

get a complete sound image from either guitar. I was tempted to add a little more bass, but this tended to induce feedback in the RainSong and woofiness in the Martin. But the tone improved significantly by judiciously using the tweeter, providing an ideal sonic setting for delicate finger-picking and some chords with a capo at the fifth and seventh frets.

The effects on the Pro-250 are numerous but perhaps a bit esoteric for

traditionally minded acoustic players, though each of the reverbs provided welcome texture and dimension when used in moderation. When the amp is used as an all-in-one amp and/or PA, the possibilities become a lot more intriguing. I took advantage of the two-channel setup and the independent effects channels to plug a vocal mic into channel two and strum a psychedelic take on Marc Bolan's "Unicorn," complete with a flanger on the guitar and rotary-speaker simulator on the vocal.

NATURAL TONES, PLENTY OF POWER

For an acoustic musician who plays house parties, coffeehouses, and farmers' markets, the Pro-250 is something of an audio Swiss Army knife. It's loud enough to work in most small- to medium-size rooms and can be used as a stage monitor in larger ones by routing the signal to the PA via the built-in DI. With the proper combination of bass, highs, tweeter, and notch filter dialed in, the Pro-250 can deliver very natural tones, and its easily tailored control set allows the Pro-250 to capture a guitar's essential character or alter it to cut through a dense mix.

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