The Review:

EVOLVE 50
Column Loudspeaker

For when a stick PA is too ‘slim’ for your tastes.

Review: Mark Davie

Six seconds. That’s how long the EV app reckoned it would take to get the Evolve 50 up and running. By the time we got the column bits unzipped and plugged, we were all staring at the Evolve 50. It broke from the ideologies of its predecessors, a magnetic pole to slip in between your speaker column and sub.

A minute later, we were all staring at the Evolve 50, and while it took the form of a stick PA, it was immediately obvious there were some ideological differences to Bose’s original ‘one-PA-for-every-performer’ paradigm. For starters, it has a built-in 1-kW, the sort of curved bottom system that’s become a concert line array to cover the floor while still projecting into the stands. Great when the act is flown four stories into the air, but when the whole thing stands barely over two metres tall, that bottom lip is not pointing straight at your feet.

Evolve’s built-in equalisation system has a wide horizontal spread, high output power, and Bluetooth streaming. It’s a nice touch to see whether you’re peaking. It’s also laid back like the Bose Live Setup, with the treble turned down one or two dB. Of all the stick PAs we’ve tested, the Bose stood out as the most natural reproduction, the JBL Eon One was an all-round great sounding system that proved a dark horse for its price, and the HK Electronics system had a clarity and three-dimensionality to the vocals that was unparalleled.

The Evolve 50 is more aggressive than any of those. It’s powerful and suited to anyone looking into the stick PA format but doesn’t want to stray too far away from the sound and ‘balls’ of a typical top box and sub combination.

STEREO STICKS

The Evolve 50 can happily live in both worlds; whilst it will work as a boxy, stereo rock PA, it still holds the single stick pose well. When it comes down to it, a portable column speaker needs to do a few things well; it has to be easy to set up, have a wide horizontal spread, high feedback rejection, and have enough inputs on the back to cater for most gigs.

Evolve 50 goes up quickly, covers 120 degrees in the horizontal plane, and you can stand in front of it with a mic, without any issues. So let’s look at those inputs:

The onboard mixer has three channels; two mic/line inputs on combo jacks, and a stereo input that can be fed via a minijack, RCA, or a Bluetooth stream. The mono inputs have an interesting design. It didn’t appear to matter whether you plugged a mic or line source into either jack or XLR inputs, the volume control still exhibited the same range. There was plenty of level for any source and plugging a line input into the XLR didn’t send it off. No mic/line switches, it just worked. It seems a relatively foolproof design that adapts to the user. Nice. On the downside, there’s no dedicated instrument/DI input. Initially, I didn’t think that would be a problem for me, as I carry my own LR Baggs Para DI with my acoustic. However, when I plugged it in and turned phantom power on, it sounded like I was playing a fart machine through a distortion box. I’m sure that didn’t work either. On further investigation I found out the phantom power only ran +15V, not the +48V I needed to run either device. It was probably unfortunate the first two things I plugged in were too power hungry; reviewer’s luck, I guess. EV’s lower phantom power is designed for the lower power requirements of condenser microphones, and restricted so it doesn’t blow up your mic inputs if you happen to plug one in while phantom is on. It’s a fair enough call, but I still think if you’re going to have phantom power onboard, it may as well work.

Rounding out the input section, the screen defaults to show input meters for all three channels. It’s a nice touch to see whether you’re peaking.

TEETH TO IT

EV has gone heavy into Bluetooth on Evolve 50. You can use Bluetooth to both control the device via the EV Quickstart app — available for iOS and Android devices — as well as stream music directly to channel three of the onboard mixer. To stream you just have to scroll to the Bluetooth menu and click on ‘Streaming’ to start the pairing process. No codes required and I had music playing off my iPhone 6 in a jiffy. In the same Bluetooth menu on the speaker you also have the option to turn on Control App, which opens up a dialogue with the EV Quickstart app. I had both Bluetooth streams running simultaneously without any problems.

Quickstart is a simple app that gives you immediate access to master mute and volume. It also gives you control over the three-band EQ, with a range of +12 to -6dB in 1dB steps. There is a selectable mid frequency that can range from 200Hz to 12kHz, but you can only access that control via the touch ‘+’/’-’ knobs on the mixer itself. It would have been nice if this was included in the app, too.

There are also four overall modes; Club, Blues, Live and Speech. They range from bass-heavy to bass cut, with Live being the flattest of the bunch. They’re all well designed presets that don’t go too hard either way. The EQ and presets are available via the DSP menu on the mixer, but it’s hard to imagine a more straightforward interface to use the app than a push button scroll wheel.

Other onboard functions include fine control of sub level between -96dB to +10dB, as well as a few other features: the option to mute, the option to muffle a signal to a different speaker via the ‘Delay’ output. If you’re using the pre or post fader output, you can also set it up with the delay setting that reads simultaneously in meters and feet. It can go up to 100m in increments of 10cm. The rest of the menu includes controls for LED on off, display brightness and contrast settings, as well as the ability to store and recall up to five system settings.

STICK EVOLUTION

It’s obvious that EV intends for the Evolve 50 to be more than just a stick shadowing a performer. It breaks from the ideologies of its predecessors, but it’s better for it. Rather than being a me-too product, EV has taken a step towards fulfilling the true potential of stick PAs, an easy-to-use PA, for any occasion. With the ability to simply set up as a stereo PA, and its powerful rock ‘n’ roll capable vicing, you won’t have to worry about it not playing its role.