



# BREEDLOVE

## Passport B350/SME-4

### Acoustic Bass

With acoustic music gone mainstream once again, it's a fine time for bassists to make sure they will fit in when it comes to image as well as sound. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

It's easy to imagine that the surge in interest in acoustic basses over the last four or five years is simply down to our adoption of the romantic notion of playing music outdoors on the metaphorical porch. The more practical minded will point to the improvements in design and build quality, which have led to more reliable, better-sounding instruments – or to the fact that, after years of loitering on the periphery, those seeking to play low notes have finally come to see the acoustic bass as a legitimate tool that can serve some valuable musical purpose. While these instruments aren't geared towards every style of music, you can certainly practice on them with or without the aid of amplification.

Breedlove was established as a going concern by Larry Breedlove and Steve Henderson in 1992 in Bend, Oregon. In 1994 Larry's brother Kim joined the fold and he remains with the company to this day, the sole survivor of the original trio and Breedlove's master luthier. Breedlove offers a wide range of acoustic guitars, both with and without cutaways; the handbuilt models retail in excess of £7000, but the Passport line comprises a selection of more affordable instruments made in Korea, and this includes the B350/SME-4 bass we're looking at this month.



Cutaway gives excellent upper fretboard access



Pointy headstock adds the familiar modern Breedlove touch

The laminated sapele and solid sitka spruce-topped cutaway B350/SME-4 comes from the affordable Passport line

It's a cutaway model, with a solid sitka spruce top with a pleasing grain pattern enriched by the semi-gloss finish, outlined by black binding and decorated by an attractively simple nine-ring soundhole rosette. The back and sides – framed by black binding – are made from laminated sapele. While it isn't as big as some acoustic basses,

the B350's body is still a fair size, just under 390mm from top to bottom of the rear bout. Add to this a depth of 120mm and you've got a fairly bulky instrument. Still, a large chamber is required for practical acoustic volume and tone, and you get used to it pretty quickly.

The neck is made of three pieces of nato and set into the body. ➔

#### FACTFILE

##### BREEDLOVE PASSPORT B350/SME-4

DESCRIPTION Hollowbody bass. Made in Korea  
PRICE £725

BUILD Solid sitka spruce top, sapele back and sides, set-in nato mahogany neck with medium nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Closed gear mini-tuners and rosewood bridge with ToneStone saddle. Chrome hardware  
ELECTRICS Active with undersaddle piezo transducer, Volume, Low and high controls and onboard chromatic tuner  
LEFT-HANDERS No  
FINISH Natural satin only  
RANGE OPTIONS None

SCALE LENGTH 32"/813mm  
NECK WIDTH Nut 42.5mm  
12th fret 57mm  
DEPTH OF NECK First fret 23mm  
12th fret 26mm  
STRING SPACING Nut 11.5mm  
Bridge 20mm  
ACTION AS SUPPLIED 12th fret treble 2mm  
12th fret bass 3mm  
WEIGHT 2.61kg/5.75lbs

CONTACT Rosetti  
01376 550033  
www.rosetti.co.uk

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**Washburn  
AB10**

A slim-bodied, fairly electro-orientated acoustic bass with distinctive slotted soundholes and a full 34" scale neck  
RRP £449

**Boulder Creek  
EBR6-4N**

Big-bodied and full-scale, made of laminated koa with an offset soundhole and a soundport on the upper bout. Plugged-in sound retains an acoustic feel  
RRP £747

**Bass Collection**

Electro-Acoustic Bass  
A super-affordable entry-level full-scale cutaway acoustic bass guitar with a solid spruce top and a preamp with four-band EQ and a tuner  
RRP £199

At first glance the profile looks a little on the chunky side, but in practice it sits snugly under the hand. The headstock is Breedlove's familiar narrowing oblong with a triangular protrusion, faced in black with a squiggly company logo and four sealed chrome tuners.

The 32"/813mm scale may initially feel slightly compressed if you're used to the full 34", but it gradually gets easier and more fun to deal with. The rosewood fingerboard carries 22 expertly-seated medium nickel frets, while the dot markers are adjacent to the E string below the octave and beneath the G string from the 12th fret upwards. If this sounds a bit confusing, there are also conventionally-sited white dots along the top edge.

The bridge is carved from rosewood, with a one-piece white ToneStone (plastic composite) saddle. If you want to adjust the neck relief, the truss rod is accessed via the soundhole. Mission control – namely Breedlove's Passport Tuner VTC preamp – is located on the top of the front bout and is hooked up to a piezo pickup located beneath the saddle. The SME's jack socket operates both as the rear strap button and as a location for the 9v battery compartment. As well as an easy-to-use chromatic tuner, the preamp also

Nicely cross-silked solid spruce top with a pinless string-through rosewood bridge



offers a volume and two tone controls: Low, which enables 'boost or cut to low frequencies over a broad range', and High, which 'will adjust the upper (higher) frequency ranges'.

**Sounds**

The Breedlove has a big, bright acoustic tone. In many ways it's the antithesis of a true upright as there's minimal thud, plus a piano-esque quality to the lower strings and sparkling definition in the

boosting the Low knob is a different matter: you get a smoother sound where notes retain plenty of definition and growl in the lower registers but are rounder without the slightly synthetic-sounding spikiness. It's altogether more natural sounding.

At the bottom end, the Low control is superbly well-attenuated; boosting level induces a fatter sound that just about gets the fixtures and fittings rattling without ever reaching overload. Combine full boost with full cut to High and you've got a rootsy sound that will work in blues or melodic pop/rock or retro soul. With High flat, the sound is big, ballsy and aggressive, a road you should choose to travel for contemporary rock or even funk.

**The Breedlove isn't too unwieldy and the medium scale helps you get around, but the sound still has plenty of projection**



Basic onboard preamp with Volume, High, Low and a tuner

second octave. If anything it's a little on the bright side, but remember, it's a brand-new bass with brand-new strings (D'Addario 170s, which are designed to be bright-sounding) and the tone will surely calm down once you get a bit of sweat into them. The plus side of this is plenty of volume and projection for unplugged practising and jamming.

Plugging in gives a pretty accurate reproduction of the acoustic sound, although it's gnarlier, with more grit. Concerns about the G string being overly brittle prove unfounded – there's an aggressive snap here but just enough substance behind it – and generally the SME is evenly responsive across the neck with a decent mix of solidity and clarity together with a suggestion of high-mid honk.

If the SME seems already bright and lively enough then you should refrain from boosting the High control; you lose some depth, the nasal honk increases, and the G string tone becomes much harder. Taking the opposite course by

**Verdict**

The Breedlove is a very nice instrument, and certainly well put together. It isn't as big or unwieldy as many acoustic bass guitars, and the medium scale really helps you get around, but the unplugged sound is still big with plenty of projection; if the distinctively lively, chiming tone isn't for you, then opting for different strings could work wonders. There's a fair amount of choice in this price bracket, but the stylish Breedlove offers enough to justify your investigation.

**FINAL SCORE**

BREEDLOVE PASSPORT B350/SME-4	
<b>Build Quality</b>	18/20
<b>Playability</b>	16/20
<b>Sound</b>	17/20
<b>Value for money</b>	16/20
<b>Vibe</b>	17/20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>84%</b>