

# **BASS**

P L A Y E R

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## **Rob Allen MB-2**

### **4-String Fretless Bass**

By Scott Malandrone

Looking for a lightweight electric with a woody, upright-like sound? That's just what the Rob Allen MB-2 delivers: gobs of deep throb with strong punch. Allen--whose resume includes a stint with luthier Rick Turner--offers the MB in both fretted and fretless versions. We tried an MB-2 semi-hollow fretless that came with LaBella black-nylon tapewound strings, which match the Allen's natural sound perfectly.

At less than six-and-a-half pounds, the MB-2 is a joy to strap on and play. (Four sets? No problem.) The MB-2's polymerized-tung-oil and carnuba-wax finished body features two different woods: swamp ash for the back and the bookmatched top of quilted maple. The back is a solid piece of ash, rather than two pieces joined at the center; this is unusual because wood stock this wide is rare and more expensive. Allen trims the top with great-looking grained ivoroid binding. Although the oil finish allows the wood to speak, on our test bass it was a bit splotchy in spots.

Tapping on the top reveals the hollowed-out areas of the swamp-ash back: one cavity runs along top of the upper bout, while a second route is near the bottom bout. This not only removes weight but adds resonance and volume to the acoustic sound. Allen also counter-sinks the cocobolo bridge 1/4" into the body for more direct contact with the swamp ash back. (The strings also run through the body.) Rob scores extra points for the elegant cocobolo knob, which adjusts the output of the piezo strip mounted underneath the Corian saddle.

The MB-2 plays great. Like the body, the bird's-eye-maple neck sports an oil finish; combined with the rounded edges of the cocobolo fingerboard, your left hand glides atop the tapewound strings. Overall, Allen did a great job on the setup, including a properly tapered nut (although the slots are a bit wide), a good profile on the bridge saddle, and nice relief on the neck. (Allen uses a round truss rod housed inside a heavy-duty aluminum U channel, which he claims adds strength, evens out response, and prevents the neck from twisting.)

Although Allen worked for Turner, Rob's bass is the polar opposite of Rick's Electroline I solidbody (Product Profiles, July '97). While the Turner delivers brilliant, modern "mwah" thanks to custom electronics and a pakka fingerboard, the Allen is all about earthy, natural sound. There's nothing harsh-sounding about the MB-2; it's one of the most organic electrics we've heard. It also has superb doghouse-like thud and a quick decay that's great when palm-muting. The MB-2 would be great in many settings--particularly blues, jazz, R [and] B, and even rock. If you play upright and you're thinking of doubling on electric, you'll be pleased with the Allen's familiar sound. If the MB-2 sounds appealing, so should its \$1,500 sticker. Like most introductory prices, though, you probably shouldn't expect it to last for long. The fine sound, playability, and craftsman-ship of the Allen bass could easily retail for much more. This one's quite a deal, folks.