

SOUND DISTILLED TO A LIGHT BUT POTENT BREW

By R. A. Lindquist

Hand trucks be damned! Real men carry their speakers, amp and mixer by hand and all at one time

No matter how you look at it, set-up time is time wasted—you're paid to play. Anything you can do to reduce the minutes you spend loading-in is jingle in your pocket. To this end, many manufacturers have been noodling up unique ways to combine components in single cases.

In the old days, there was no getting around the fact that you needed to carry at least two speakers, plus an amp, plus a mixer. This meant several trips, and carrying separate cases. Here in the new millennium, there are better ways. Thanks to lightweight, reliable amplifiers dreamt up by folks in lab coats, we now have powered mixers and powered speakers. But how can you carry two speakers and your amp and mixer in one trip? Set aside the obvious question ("Why?") and just assume, for a moment, that hand trucks don't exist. Let's also assume you have two good arms and can carry a speaker with each. Now, how are you going to carry an amp and mixer? How about just slinging it over your shoulder?

It's Not a Cooler...It's Cooler!

There's a very fine line that separates the end product of careful planning, skillful engineering and relentless testing from simply a great idea hatched over a few ales. "Case" in point: the GigRac 600 from Soundcraft. We're really not sure which side of the line was responsible. On the "rocket surgery" side, you have a well-chiseled design that required some quality time in the think tank. On the tavern side, the unit sports features that are just too cool to have come from those geeks in lab coats.

Topping the list of GigRac 600's best features is what it doesn't have—things you really don't need. What you do have is an all-purpose unit with eight inputs and dual 300-watt amps, which can be configured as a 600-watt mono house



system or 300-watt mono house system with 300 watts for stage monitors. (An even more budget-conscious unit, the GigRac 300, with 300 watts total power, is also available.) In addition, it all comes mounted in a vented case that's tougher than a turtle shell. To release the lid, just unbuckle the strap. There are no latches to get caught on clothes, cables or other pieces of gear. Inside the lid, there's a web of bungee cords perfect for storing a couple of mics. With the top closed and "buckled," you can carry the unit over your shoulder like a newspaper carrier on his daily route.

The front panel of the GigRac is a picture of functional simplicity. Each of the eight inputs has two bands of EQ (treble and bass, $\pm 15\text{dB}$), an effect send knob, and level controls for the monitor mix and main mix. Knobs are color coded all the way across so you don't accidentally boost the bass when you want a little more reverb.

All eight inputs can be used for microphones. Inputs 1-4 have 48v phantom power and an attenuation pad for matching levels, while 5-8 can also be used for instruments or line inputs. Stereo RCA connectors that sum to mono are provided on two of the inputs—a perfect design for use with a dual CDP. In addition, there are eight assignable, preset reverb/echo effects, so you can add a little echo to your vocals without affecting the music. There's also a 7-band graphic EQ, submix input, 10-segment LED output meter, and an amp clip light. Outputs are provided for Speakon connectors and 1/4" phone plugs.

10 Minutes to Go

While it may be quite insane to actually carry two speakers with a GigRac slung over your shoulder, it's not a particu-

larly tough task. For this report, we teamed the GigRac with our workhorse EV SX100 cabinets. All together the system weighed well under a hundred pounds, but trying to actually maneuver down a narrow hallway was akin to a Hummer doing a k-turn in a china shop.

With load-in complete, it was simply a matter of popping the covers off the GigRac, running the speaker cables and connecting up our sound sources. For our "on-the-road" situation, we used the GigRac as a PA for a six-piece praise and worship team at a local church. The job required four vocal mics, two piano mics and direct inputs from two guitars, along with house system and stage monitors. Total set-up time was less than 30 minutes. For a normal DJ performance, it should take less than ten minutes, depending on the venue. This versatility makes the GigRac a truly worthwhile investment for the DJ who does everything from small-gig sound reinforcement to high-end karaoke to typical DJ events.

A Slip-Up?

There is one issue, however, that may have slipped by the designers during that last round of brews. It concerns that rough, tough case itself. It's slippery. Not only is it slippery, but it's molded in such a way that there's very little contact between the case and the surface it's set on. It's almost like it's on ice skates. In our real world test, we had the GigRac set up on a wooden stool, which is a pretty common way to do things in

bars, coffeehouses and smaller venues. The moment we turned our backs, CRASH! It was on the floor. The good news was, there was no apparent damage to the electronics. The bad news was, one of the speaker jacks had busted so we were out one channel.

Only when the dust had cleared and everything was being put away did we find, tucked away in the removable cover of the unit, the "GigMat"—a rubbery pad that can, and should, be placed under the GigRac to prevent it from sliding off a table. Wouldn't it make more sense just to mount rubber strips along the bottom of the case?

While the folks at Soundcraft ponder that thought, let's review everything in the plus column: 8 channels, 600 watts, eight preset effects, and all the rest of the ingredients it takes for great sound in an over-the-shoulder case not much larger than a cooler. We'll drink to that. •

To get all the specifics on the GigRac, go straight to www.gigrac.com. For more on Soundcraft and the company's wide selection of professional mixers, check out www.soundcraft.com.

MSRPs: GigRac 600 - \$649.99; GigRac 300 - \$429.99

Soundcraft • 8500 Balboa Blvd. • Northridge, CA 91329
Tel: 888-251-8352 / 818-920-3212 • Fax: 818-920-3285