

ROLAND AC-33 £359
ACOUSTIC AMPS

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Roland AC-33 £359

A portable stereo acoustic amp that takes batteries and includes a looper? Buskers, take note... *by Dave Durban*

The now well-established AC-60 marked Roland's first foray into the world of acoustic instrument amplification. Indeed, the AC-90 later followed to bolster the 'Acoustic Chorus' range with its added power, speaker and cabinet size. This time, however, Roland's brand new AA battery-powered AC-33 marries sophisticated tweaks with super portability to satisfy a broader spectrum of acoustic performers on the move.

Naturally, the AC-33 is a smaller and far more portable package than its big brothers, otherwise it's fairly similar visually, with a hard-wearing black vinyl finish and rear-mounted vertically orientated control panel. Added to the AC-33 is a handy front-mounted tilt-back stand, situated on the underside of the cabinet.

On first handling, the AC-33 is impressively manageable, making it an effortless task manoeuvring the 4.7kg unit to and from prime busking positions, while its rugged construction should be able to withstand the toughest high-street gig.

Eight AA batteries provide 20-watts of solid-state power (10-watts per side) through its small five-inch (120mm) speakers. Using standard alkaline batteries, Roland claims that you're able to achieve around eight hours battery life under continuous use. It's worth noting that when using Roland's supplied PSB 12U power adaptor, the AC-33 produces 30-watts (15-watts per side).

Typically, the control panel mirrors Roland's two-tone colour scheme, though its black

and beige labelling is perfectly legible and enables you to distinguish between the amp's dual-channel configurations with no problems. On this note, the AC-33 provides a Guitar and

The Rivals

AER's top-end **Compact Mobile** (£1,149) offers three hours of unplugged use and 60-watts of power. You might still find a few **Crate TX30E** battery-powered acoustic amps out there – the RRP was £229. **Stagg's MOB20** (£129) has a built-in rechargeable battery pack for those on the move, as well as onboard digital reverb.



The Phrase Looper is easily controlled with just two buttons

The AC-33's most exciting feature is the built-in Phrase Looper. It's sure to enhance your on-the-go performance

a Mic/Line channel – both featuring a built-in chorus effect. Alongside this, both channels can be blended and used simultaneously. For example, a duo can utilise both channels, or your guitar's pickup (with internal preamp) can also be blended with a separate pickup. And, of course, using the XLR input you can plug in a mic and sing while playing your guitar.

In addition to the built-in chorus, we also have an onboard reverb/ambience effect, designed by Roland to add space and a 3D-like depth to the sound. There's also an anti-feedback facility that should attenuate those peaking frequencies to cut feedback.

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performance by providing 40 seconds of recording time and a neat overdub feature, which allows you to record, loop and jam over your own ideas with either an acoustic instrument or your own vocal. Control-wise it's all pretty straightforward, though it does take some time to get the knack of it. Firstly, press the rec/play/overdub button once to start recording (the 'rec' LED will flash red indicating recording), press the rec/play/overdub button once again to switch to play (this allows you to perform over the recorded sound), indicated by a green led, and then hit the same button to then switch between overdub and play. The other button operates the stop/clear function.

To truly build and create on the fly, it's recommended that you use two BOSS FS-5U

footswitches or one FS-6 footswitch. These will also serve to switch in or out the chorus and reverb/ambience effects – see spec check for details. Unfortunately, however, the footswitches are an optional extra, though they will add another dimension for little outlay.

Sounds

As an acoustic performer on the move, all you really require is an authentic as possible recreation of your acoustic's natural sound with a couple of sweet sounding, easy-to-use effects. And that's exactly what you get. The AC-33 reproduces our Larrivée D-03R's wholesome and warm acoustic tone with aplomb, and with all EQs set at around 12 o'clock, the response is tight yet surprisingly dynamic with picking or strumming techniques. The use of wide chorus adds a subtle space and depth to proceedings, while reverb gives your tone a little zest and adding more ambience to the effect delivers a broader-feeling attack.

Despite its bijou size, the AC-33 kicks out ample volume for the average high street, and sounds pretty good doing it to boot. However, we wonder whether it could quite compete with Oxford Street's bustling crowds, for example.

Verdict

Somewhat surprisingly, there are very few battery-powered acoustic amps out there. However, Roland's delightful AC-33 firmly sets itself up as the leader in this narrow market place, offering modern looks, great portability, natural tones and excellent versatility, albeit for a not insignificant price. With the new Phrase Looper function in tow, it's also brilliant fun. **G**

The Bottom Line

We like: Build quality; size; versatility; fun factor

We dislike: Nothing

Guitarist says: It's a small package that delivers a big versatile punch and should be top of the list for any on-the-go performer



Roland AC-33

PRICE: £359

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Solid-state, battery-powered stereo acoustic amplifier

OUTPUT: 30 watts (15 + 15 watts) with AC power adaptor and 20 watts (10 + 10 watts) when powered by eight AA batteries

DIMENSIONS: 243 (h) x 318 (w) x 223mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4.7/10.6 approx

LOUDSPEAKER: Two five-inch speakers

CHANNELS: Guitar and Mic/Line input channels

CONTROLS: Guitar channel – volume, treble, middle and bass controls, three-way chorus mini-switch (wide, space and off) Mic/Line channel – volume, bass and treble controls three-way chorus mini-switch (wide, space and off) Phrase Looper – Rec/overdub/play button, stop/clear button. Anti-feedback on/off mini-switch, reverb/ambience control knob and master volume control

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Guitar channel – jack input; Mic/Line channel – XLR input, one jack input. Onboard jack headphone input. Rear Panel – DC input, left and right jack footswitch inputs, line out right and left mono jack outputs, auxiliary level control, auxiliary stereo input, right and left auxiliary inputs (RCA-types compatible with iPod and mp3)

RANGE OPTIONS: The 90-watt AC-90 (£612) heads up the Acoustic Chorus range, while the 60-watt AC-60 (£458) is the original AC acoustic amp

Roland UK

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www.roland.co.uk

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

