

## The rivals

### UNICO

Marshall AS100D	£588
SWR California Blonde	£749
AER Domino	£895

The four-channel Marshall offers 50W + 50W stereo with semi-parametric mid-EQ for main channel and lots more. The 100W two-channel SWR has input gain with clip LED, phase switch, aural enhancer, three-band EQ. AER's four-channel 100W compact amp is most similar with two jack and two combi XLR/jack inputs and switchable 24V/48V phantom power

### AC-60

Peavey Ecoustic 110 EFX	£369
Ashdown Acoustic Radiator1	£425/£525 (black vinyl/cherry)
AER Alpha	£465

Peavey's two-channel Ecoustic is bi-amped with semi-programmable multi-effects and four-band graphic EQ and phase. Ashdown's unit carries two channels and 100 watts with features aplenty. AER's compact single channel/dual input 40W unit offers input gain with clip LED, digital reverb, 24V phantom power and more

A four-channel pro acoustic amp from Swiss specialists Schertler and a mid-price, effects-laden, two-channel stereo acoustic combo from Roland by Matthew Wig

# Schertler Unico & Roland AC-60 £799 & £369

**W**hether you're a performing virtuoso solo guitarist or the person in the pub bashing out cover versions on a Sunday afternoon with your cut-price electro – compact, portable and reliable acoustic amplification is a huge advantage. Aiming to provide for both these diverse situations we have a high-end unit from Swiss acoustic amplification specialist Schertler and a typically clever little box of acoustic tricks from Roland.

### Schertler Unico

When it comes to the pursuit of ultimate acoustic sound reproduction Schertler is very much a front runner,

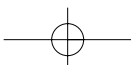
and you can find out more about this company in the Santa Cruz Studio review on page 118.

Having developed both external preamps for its existing pickups, as well as powered speaker cabinets (see Spec options) it would seem logical that an all-in-one solution was the next step. The fairly compact and portable Unico is an impressive looking answer, with four channels to cover any combination of inputs and a considerable resource of power.

At first glance you might confuse this amp with an AER, but aside from the similarly textured durable looking charcoal finish it's quite different. Although more robustly assembled,

you'll recognise this typical bass reflex enclosure's layout as being similar to a home stereo speaker. Its eight-inch Sica driver comes from the same well-established and widely used Italian firm that produces the new Jensens. On the floor of this acoustic wool-lined cab you'll find a Belton reverb tank, which is magnetically shielded to reduce noise and is driven by a pure Class A circuit.

Despite creating a sleeker look, the lack of corner protectors may leave the Unico vulnerable to scuffs. But the metal front grille, particularly chunky rubber feet, spring-loaded rubber-grip metal carrying handle and metal stand socket on its base should





meet the demands of professional business.

Sitting in the top's recess, the control panel is refreshingly logical, sectioned like a mixing desk into parallel channels. All inputs, pots and switches are nicely spaced out and the knobs are all non-slip, but the EQ is not centre-notched and the labelling could be brighter.

Schertler is obviously selling this amp on sound quality rather than features, and if you check out this company's product range you'll rumble the Unico's own-brand bias which proves to be both its strength and its weakness.

If you reference across to the spec check you'll gather the MIC channel is very straightforward. The DYN channel (referencing Schertler's DYN family of electrodynamic contact transducers) is the only one armed with feedback attenuation, which makes sense considering this is biased for notoriously sensitive low-output sources like mini electret condenser mics. Its Neutrik combi-input covers all the microphone plug, wiring and phantom power options you may encounter. Again the STAT channel is in reference to Schertler's STAT family of electrostatic bridge-mount transducers for double-basses, cellos, violins, etc, but this is also the input for general active electro-acoustic pickup systems. While the 'warm' switch (a low-pass filter) is aimed at the STAT devices, the 10V phantom power can run most typical acoustic guitar preamps and electret mics. As with the MIC channel, the LINE channel has just the three-band EQ.

The low-cut switch allows the Unico to act as a mid-range amp when used with an active bass extension speaker.

Choosing a spring reverb for this unit seems a little at odds, since even the best of them colour your sound to

some extent. Digital systems can sound clinical, but are generally more transparent.

This company's new Bluestick under-saddle transducer may produce a truer tone and be more feedback resistant than comparable piezo devices, but obviously most steel-string electros carry the latter and we presume that you'll occasionally need to run the Unico at full whack. More general feedback controlling tools and EQ on the STAT channel, as well as input gain controls with clip LEDs, might have made this amp more appealing to players in louder bands, but the features and spec definitely favour the purist.

**SOUNDS:** We've tested the Unico using the Schertler Bluestick equipped Santa Cruz Studio. Of course this new pickup has an unfamiliar tone too, but we always use a consistent counter-reference (DI'd into the desk and monitor through relatively transparent speakers) to gauge the tone of every acoustic amp. Despite prioritising harmonic accuracy with all components, the Unico can't physically help exerting some subtle influence on your sound. Of all the amps we've reviewed, the SWR California Blonde (Sep 2002) gave a similarly punchy performance, while the purist ethics follow AER's avoidance of non-essential tweaks.

You've got a potent resource of

#### SCHERTLER UNICO TEST RESULTS

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

**WE LIKED** Tank-like construction and punchy, acoustically faithful sound  
**WE DISLIKED** Specialised features and limited connection options

## SCHERTLER UNICO & ROLAND AC-60 £799 & £369

### ACOUSTIC AMPLIFIERS

deep, fully-formed bottom end that, like that SWR, tracks your playing exceptionally tightly, and each EQ pot's 15dB cut/boost guarantees you ample control if you need it. Most impressive is the smooth, harmonically intact, properly flat mid-range body, which offers natural, non-muffled warmth – a boon for any decent acoustic pickup. The top end is clean and penetrating yet never harsh (on flat EQ), reproducing the pickup's natural crispness.

All in all the Unico provides the presence and outstanding audibility you need in a monitor, sounding like it's right next to you when it's several metres away. Its well-behaved yet emphatic output can fill a room without over-stretching its power resources or losing its composure.

We're not totally convinced, however, by the reverb, which sounds unnecessarily characterful to us at higher levels.

#### Roland AC-60

The sorry state of the acoustic guitar business and accordingly lucrative keyboard market in the 1980s probably deterred Roland from taking the lead with acoustic amplification, because in retrospect, they held a trump card back then. Players using electro-acoustics in bands, bereft of dedicated back-line, could be found using one or other of Roland's hugely successful, all-transistor Jazz Chorus electric guitar amps because of their sympathetically clean tone. If you know Talking Heads' 1984 live concert film *Stop Making Sense*, you'll get a glimpse of David Byrne's JC-120 during the solo acoustic opener *Psycho Killer*.

The first of the pioneering Trace Elliot acoustic combos arrived in about 1989, but Roland didn't follow suit until several years later with its AC-100 Acoustic Chorus – a big, heavy, tri-amped, triple speaker, twin channel whopper with the typical brown livery that we're glad to see losing favour these days. In contrast, the new AC-60 follows the lead of more compact units like AER's Alpha or, going further back, Trace's TA50R.

Unlike the Schertler, Roland's

#### ROLAND AC-60

**PRICE:** £369 (inc padded carry case)

**ORIGIN:** Malaysia

**TYPE:** Two-channel stereo acoustic amplifier with reverb/delay and chorus

**OUTPUT:** 30W + 30W RMS

**DIMENSIONS:** 380 x 270 x 268mm

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 9.8/21.5

**CABINET:** MDF, bass reflex enclosure with frontal port

**SPEAKERS:** 2 x 6.5-inch Roland custom speakers

**CHANNELS:** GUITAR – 6.4mm-jack input, switchable for magnetic/active or passive piezo pickups; MIC/LINE – input with XLR/6.4mm-jack combi input, switchable for balanced, low Z dynamic/condenser mics or line level sources

**CONTROLS:** GUITAR – bass/middle/treble EQ, shape (fixed EQ) switch, chorus on/off, volume; MIC/LINE – bass/middle/treble EQ, chorus on/off, volume. Master volume, master reverb/delay, master chorus, mute and anti-feedback frequency with auto-detect start switch

**FOOTSWITCH:** Stereo jack socket 1 – chorus on/off and reverb/delay on/off; stereo jack socket 2 – mute on/off and anti-feedback control. Footswitches not included

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Digital chorus (three types) and reverb/delay, 48V (MIC/LINE) phantom power, stereo headphone output, stereo line out (pre-master) XLR sockets, mono line out (pre-master) jack socket, tuner/DI out (pre EQ/vol) stereo jack socket, subwoofer output (post master), stereo aux in jack and phono sockets. Standard 3.8cm/1.5-inch stand socket and folding tilt stand

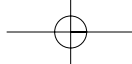
**RANGE OPTIONS:** BOSS FS-5U/FS-5L (£33) footswitches, KCW-1 powered 200W subwoofer (£399)

**Roland UK**  
01792 702701

→ [www.roland.co.uk](http://www.roland.co.uk)



Roland's control panel on the AC-60 is as clear as ever



## SCHERTLER UNICO & ROLAND AC-60 £799 & £369

### ACOUSTIC AMPLIFIERS

Some of the Schertler's features are a touch too specialised

#### SCHERTLER UNICO

**PRICE:** £699

**ORIGIN:** Switzerland

**TYPE:** Four-channel acoustic amplifier with spring reverb

**OUTPUT:** 150W RMS

**DIMENSIONS:** 270 x 340 x 390mm

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 14/31

**CABINET:** Plywood, bass reflex enclosure with twin frontal ports

**SPEAKERS:** 1 x 8-inch Sica bass/mid-range, 1 x dome tweeter

**CHANNELS:** MIC – XLR input for balanced, low Z dynamic or condenser mics; DYN – XLR/6.4mm jack combi input for both balanced and unbalanced low level, low Z sources; STAT – 6.4mm-jack input for typical active acoustic pickup systems; LINE – 6.4mm jack input for line level sources.

**CONTROLS:** MIC – high/mid/low EQ, reverb, volume; DYN – high/low EQ, resonance (notch) filter, reverb, volume; STAT – warm (low pass filter), high/low EQ, reverb, volume; LINE – high/mid/low EQ, reverb, volume. Master volume, master reverb, low cut switch and aux send

**FOOTSWITCH:** No

**ADDITIONAL**

**FEATURES:** Spring reverb, 48V (MIC) and 10V (DYN/STAT) phantom power, insert jack socket, line out jack socket (post-master), DI out (pre-master) XLR socket, aux out jack socket (pre-master) and ground lift. Standard 3.8cm/1.5-inch stand socket

**Frontrunner**  
0115 945 9452  
www.schertler.com

#### ROLAND AC-60 TEST RESULTS

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

**WE LIKED** Excellent effects section and comprehensive connection options  
**WE DISLIKED** Slightly processed quality to the sound

→ textured black exterior is a stuck-on covering rather than a spray-on coating. This unit's cabinet is also a bass reflex enclosure, but is designed for wide dispersion to take advantage of the digital effects' stereo spread.

Checking its standard plastic handle, small rubber feet, plastic speaker stand socket and sheer black nylon grille, it's not as robustly assembled as the Unico. But then it's not aimed at the touring professional user either.

Its compact control panel layout follows that of the Roland/BOSS footpedal house style, offering an intuitive, highly visible, user-friendly interface. The small, fairly tightly spaced pots have reassuringly damped rotation, but again the EQ section knobs are not centre-notched.

Lightness, compactness and a flexible array of features are definitely this unit's strengths. Again, there are no input gain controls bar the fixed sensitivity switch for passive or active pickup systems. 'Shape' performs the typical mid-scoop with low and high lift, affecting ranges not covered by the regular EQ. The main thing, however, is the stereo spread, which allows the on-board digital chorus some interesting options. In 'Space' mode you have one speaker with full chorus effect and the other direct (it may have reverb through it) for a lateral spread in actual space; in 'Rich' mode the chorus is stereo and operates separately on three frequency bands for a fuller sound, while 'Wide' mode seems to combine the two to produce an extra-broad, 3D spread. You have a single type of

stereo digital reverb with variable decay time and the shared control knob switches over to delay at 12 o'clock, providing a sensible selection of delay times. There's no separate channel control for the reverb/delay.

It's good to find some dedicated anti-feedback capability and this master notch filter can tune into and suppress the main feedback frequency automatically. When levels are below the feedback threshold you can use it as a quick remedy for over-lively low to mid-range resonance, but this does affect your tone.

The combi-input MIC/LINE channel makes efficient sense as a flexible auxiliary for ambitious input set-ups.

Rear panel features are particularly comprehensive (see spec) with just about every connection/expansion and footswitching capability you could ever need for gigging. There's even a tilt stand for floor-mount monitoring.

**SOUNDS:** Again, we used the Schertler Bluestick-equipped Santa Cruz Studio for testing. The basic flat EQ sound is quite woolly and boxy, albeit with plenty of bass, but lacking definition. Reaching immediately for the mid-range control, this is quickly remedied with a bit of cut, leaving a far more open, balanced tone. This, however, exposes a flabby bass response. Once the way is cleared the treble is also more audible, and this amp's soft edge certainly helps the high notes remain palatably smooth. Extending both the bass and harmonic presence (accompanied by a bit more hiss), the 'shape' circuit proves a surprisingly useful scoop, addressing nasal mid-range frequencies the EQ

controls don't touch, but the result does smack of that unnaturally glossy EQ finesse and it makes the top end very thin. The AC-60 is pretty loud for its size and power rating with generally low background noise, but the output is lively in the feedback sensitive regions. Compared to the Schertler it's understandably less transparent and distinct, adding a more processed character even without effects, but in its own class this core tone is workable.

The chorus is very effective and is lush, spacious and warmer than you might expect a digital chorus to sound – but then Roland knows its effects. Reverb creates a complementary space to put you in, avoiding the sparkly clatter of some programs and the 'boing' of spring units, while the delay – with its quiet, analogue-soft, quickly decaying repeats – offers reverb-haters an alternative ambience.

#### Verdict

Both of these amps are successful in providing the right things for the right situations, proving that both Schertler and Roland know who their customers are likely to be. Schertler compares favourably in all departments, especially on price, to its obvious high-brow rival AER, only losing out in terms of range options. Roland combines contemporary compact chic and portability with a generous package of features, avoiding the costly pursuit of scrupulous sound quality to offer excellent value. **B**

#### Schertler Unico

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

#### Roland AC-60

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

