

Guitar Gear Test: Rockboard RPA100 Power Attenuator



For a few years now, I have owned a Marshall 5-watt all-tube guitar amp. The only drawback to this little beast is that it only sounds really good when you crank it all the way up and power amp distortion helps shape the sound. But by then the thing gets really loud and you can hardly use the amp at home without angry neighbors or even the police knocking on your door.

Power attenuators can provide a remedy for such problems, allowing you to turn down the volume as much as you like without any loss of sound. Unfortunately, attenuators from various manufacturers are often quite expensive. But now there is the RPA100 Power Attenuator from "Rockboard" which is available for the incredible price of about 80 Euros. I have used several tube heads from Marshall, ENGL and Hughes & Kettner to find out what you get for this absolutely competitive price.

The RPA 100 comes in a sturdy black metal housing measuring (L x W x H) 180 x 160 x 125 mm (including feet and controls) and weighs just over 1.5 kg. It stands on four rubber feet and has a side fan for air circulation to prevent the circuit from overheating. The housing has a very clean finish and looks and feels solid. It's quite big, but in practice, the device is very easy to handle.

Setting up the Rockboard RPA100 is simple: place the attenuator on or next to the amp and connect it to both the amp and the cabinet. 3 separate inputs for 4, 8 or 16 ohms cover all possible amp requirements. The result is equally amazing for all the amplifiers I have tested. Using the large, smooth-action control knob, the volume can be turned down to zero without any loss of sound. Distortion, treble, mid-range and bass remain virtually untouched and you can finally enjoy that coveted power-amp distortion sound at practical volumes. The RPA100

converts excess energy into heat, hence the built-in fan, which operates almost silently. In any case, the attenuator does its main job with flying colors.

But that is not all it can do. The DI OUT / LINE OUT allows you to send the signal directly to a PA or recording device. ON/OFF and selection switches for 2 x 12" or 4 x 12" speaker simulation ensure proper frequency correction. There is even a headphone jack. However, you may notice a slight compromise in the sound when using headphones. The result sounds quite sharp and not like what expensive IR applications can offer. There are definitely better ones out there, but they can cost ten times as much as the RPA100. However, the RPA100 does its main job of taming a tube monster perfectly.

Due to the super affordable price, I can absolutely recommend it and would even go so far as to say that this unit is a "must have" for tube amp owners.



At a glance

- power attenuator, dummy load
- max. amp output 100 Watts
- 3 x separate inputs for 4, 8 or 16 Ohm
- 1 x 3.5 mm / 1/8" AUX input
- 2 x 6.3 mm / 1/4" speaker output (parallel)
- 1 x 6.3 mm / 1/4" line output
- 1 x 3.5 mm / 1/8" headphones output
- 1 x XLR-DI output
- 1 x speaker level control
- 1 x line out level control
- 1 x cabinet simulation on/off switch
- 1 x cabinet simulation selection switch 2 x 12" or 4 x 12"

- 1 x 9V DC, 2.1 x 5.5 mm barrel plug, polarity (-) center, input voltage for operation of phones/DI/line outputs
- 1 x fan
- 1 x overload LED
- dimensions (L x W x H) 180 x 160 x 125 mm / 7.09" x 6.30" x 4.92" (incl. feet & control knobs)
- weight 1545 g / 3.41 lbs.
- price about 80 €