

Mono M80 Series

Lightweight hybrid cases



▲ The M80 2G double electric bag is a great solution for musos who carry a backup or alternative guitar.

When is a gig bag not a gig bag?
When it's a Mono hybrid case.
These products are simply in
a different league for quality,
innovative design and all-round
professional appeal.

Dave Lockwood

I must admit, I was something of a late adopter when it came to 'gig bags'. My guitars tended to travel to gigs in the back of a van, alongside heavyweight backline and PA, making a conventional hardshell case the bare minimum of practical protection and a full flightcase more like the ideal environment for anything precious. It was only when I started to do musical theatre gigs, where the gear remains set up in the venue for the run of the production with only the instruments removed overnight, that hauling three or four hard cases from car park to backstage every night began to have me looking for easier alternatives.

There are some very high-quality gig bags on the market now and I was soon converted

to their convenience, light weight and the fact that you can sling a couple of them over your shoulders while carrying a couple more. With a bag that has a decent amount of padding, as the more expensive ones all do these days, Strats and Teles can be safely hauled in and out of a car and even stacked across the back seat. Nothing on earth, however, would ever have persuaded me to carry a Gibson in one, with its characteristic, vulnerable, pitched-back headstock. That is, until I ran into the Mono M80 Series at this year's winter NAMM show.

In the bag

For me, two things set the Mono guitar cases apart. One is their Neckbrace — a foam block and Velcro strap arrangement that suspends the neck so that the headstock is not touching the sides — and the other is what they've done at the bottom of the case. Mono M80 cases incorporate a significant amount of high-density foam on either side of the base of the case to prevent the strap button from being driven into the guitar in the event of the bag being dropped vertically. The significance of the Neckbrace design cannot be overstated to a Gibson player; Strats and Teles will generally survive a backwards fall onto the floor, but Gibsons will break at the headstock,

almost without exception.

Even a well-padded bag is still vulnerable to impact damage, however, and to combat this Mono cases incorporate ABS (rigid plastic) panels fixed within the lining. This still leaves the bag lightweight and flexible, but offers a measure of protection against things falling on the case or the user accidentally knocking into hard objects while carrying it.

High-quality zips, stowable straps (so they can't catch on anything when you're not using them) and a rain-proof, tear-resistant outer skin complete the package, along with the usual assortment of auxiliary storage pockets, although even here there's some innovation, with an integral cable-tidy and a useful concealed compartment for valuable items.

Double? No trouble

The guitar range includes solid electrics, basses, acoustics up to five inches in depth and semi-acoustics, but perhaps most

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Mono M80 Series
from £129

I can't go on calling these 'gig bags' any more, they simply aren't the same thing, but 'lightweight hybrid case' is a bit of a mouthful. Whatever you choose to call them, in my experience these are the best there is, and I'm going to have to have one. In fact, make mine a double.

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▲ Storage pockets include a useful cable tidy and concealed compartment for valuables.

intriguingly, it also includes double cases for both solid electrics and basses. Double cases are actually a highly practical proposition in



▲ The Neckbrace arrangement helps to hold the headstock clear of the internal surfaces.

gig bag form, because the case itself adds so little weight, and they are obviously a real convenience to anyone who routinely carries

a backup or alternative instrument to gigs. The trick is to keep both instruments not only safe from the outside world, but also from each other, and here the Mono cases' neck support strategy is invaluable, holding each instrument as if it were being individually transported.

The current range also includes cymbal and stick bags for drummers and more general-purpose Producer and DJ bags, all displaying the same combination of military-spec materials and meticulous build quality. Of course, premium products tend to come at a premium price and even the incurably optimistic wouldn't expect these to be priced in the same league as your average gig bag. And they aren't. An M80-EG solid-body electric guitar bag will set you back £129 in the UK, and the innovative M80 2G double electric bag £199, along with the double-bass bag (no, not that sort of double bass — I mean two electric basses!). However, there is always a market for quality and I'm confident that the serious user will be willing to pay the extra for longevity, convenience in use and, above all, peace of mind.

Mono claim that they offer the "lightest, thinnest, strongest, most versatile carrying solution for the professional musician", and on this evidence, I can't disagree. ■ **PM**

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