

You Can Have It All: Quality, Value, Performance
Mojave Audio MA-200 Condenser Microphone
by Randy Poole

Mojave audio has entered into the field of condenser microphones, with two new-from-the-ground-up microphones. For this review, PSN received the MA-200 large-diaphragm, cardioid-only, vacuum-tube condenser microphone. These mics may bear the name, Mojave, but they're designed by the likes of one David Royer, well known for his ribbon microphone designs. His challenge in designing a condenser mic line, in his words, "was to do so without the shrillness of high-frequency distortion artifacts that are often encountered with modern condenser mics."

To accomplish this task, Royer used a 1-inch, gold-sputtered, 3-micron capsule, Jensen output transformers and military-grade JAN 5840 vacuum tubes. He says the electronic design is somewhat a hybrid of the U47 with the kk67 capsule. On the outside, the mic body comes in a low-gloss, black finish, with the grille of the mic sporting a traditional matte silver finish. The mic has no switchable pad, but Mojave specs say it handles 125 dB at less than 3 percent distortion.

Royer emphasizes that this is primarily second-order harmonic distortion, not the undesirable odd harmonics. The power supply is not much bigger than a direct box, and works at voltages settings of 115 and 230 volts at 50 or 60 Hz. Cables appear to be of good quality, with robust connectors reminiscent of yesteryear. Before leaving Mojave, each mic is burned in for 24 hours and well-packaged in a protective case, with the mic body double-protected in a case within a case.

So how does this thing sound? First up was a comparison test against three other tube vocal mics in this price range (\$999). With a female vocalist as the test subject, we listened to all mics one at a time through an Amek 9098 mic pre, while listening on Dynaudio BM15a's. All those listening, including the singer, choose the Mojave MA-200 by a fairly wide margin. The other mics were fine, but the Mojave elicited comments like "silky top end," "warm in the low mids, yet greater clarity," and "best sound overall."

In the weeks that followed, we threw everything we could at the Mojave including male vocals, acoustic guitar, cello, violin and tenor sax. There was nothing at which the Mojave didn't seem to excel. The male vocalist had good presence, without being muddy, commenting he liked the proximity effect. With a little careful mic positioning, the violin and cello felt well balanced and

natural-sounding, with good bottom end and detail. The low noise-floor specs of this mic also helped us as well on quiet instruments like the violin and cello. We never had to worry about the noise floor, in any of our recordings.

With no pad on this mic, we wanted to see how it handled high SPLs. Loud vocalists and close miking on tenor sax revealed no distortion issues, though that's not to say there isn't a player who could cause one. The MA-200 served us well, and I would recommend its use on loud instruments like drum overheads. In further evaluation, it was noted that vocals cut on the Mojave sat correctly in the mix with less EQ than required with other mics. It was also noted the polar pattern was a little wider than some mics tested.

In conclusion, this mic represents a leap forward in quality for this price point. It more than fills a hole in your mic closet; as it covers about half of it. Everything about the MA-200 and its accessories, power supply, shock mount, etc., speaks of quality. The mic is extremely versatile and built to last. The only knock against it that I can find is: When is the multiple-pattern version available?