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## Mojave Audio MA-200 Tube Microphone

*David Royer wheels out a new line of winning mics.*

by Russ Long, 01.15.2007

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When most people hear the name David Royer they typically think of Royer Labs and their now legendary ribbon microphones. However, long before Royer Labs ever existed, there was Mojave Audio. Mojave Audio was founded by Royer in the garage of his Fullerton, California house back in 1985. At that point it was a one-man, custom pro audio gear shop, primarily designing and building vacuum tube microphones, mic preamps and compressors for engineers in the Los Angeles area. During this period he created a number of condenser mics that became studio staples among a small group of high-end audio engineers including Bob Clearmountain, Mutt Lange and Sean Beaven. With the release of the Mojave Audio MA-200, David's nonribbon designs are now available to the masses.

### Features

The Mojave Audio MA-200 is a large diaphragm, vacuum tube condenser microphone with a fixed cardioid pickup pattern. Mojave constructs the mics utilizing hand-selected, gold-sputtered, 3-micron capsules, Jensen audio transformers, and military-grade JAN 5840 vacuum tubes wired for triode operation. An external switch allows the mic's power supply to be configured for 100 volts, 115 volts or 230 volts at either 50 Hz or 60 Hz. The mic's frequency response measures 20 Hz - 20 kHz, ±3 dB with an A-weighted self-noise of 14 dB. The mic has an impedance of 200 ohms and features a transformer-balanced output. The microphone accepts relatively high gain and the documentation provides output clipping levels at various frequencies (e.g. 132 dB @ 20 Hz, 135 dB @ 32 Hz, 136 dB @ 100 Hz, 136 dB @ 1 kHz and 136 dB @ 10 kHz). Every MA-200 microphone, power supply and cable set is burned in for 24 hours followed by meticulous testing and evaluation before leaving the factory.



The mic's accessories are elegantly packed in a briefcase size camera style case that feels like it will easily hold up to the rigors of every day use. The foam is precut to perfectly carry the power supply, cables and shockmount and the mic itself fits in a small case, which then fits in the briefcase. When fully loaded with the mic and accessories, the case weighs 13 pounds.

### In Use

I got my hands on an early MA-200 prototype over two years ago. I immediately fell in love with the mic and found that it often became the mic of choice when comparing it to other high-end mics. Based on its performance, construction, packaging and most of all sound quality, I would have assumed that the mic was going to list for around \$2,500 and sell for \$2K. What a surprise to find that the mic is actually priced at \$995. This makes it the best bargain in microphones that I've seen in years.

I had a pair of MA-200's for my review period and I've been literally using them around the clock. The MA-200 is rich, warm, open and it works well with practically any instrument or vocal. Unlike so many of the modern tube mics that emulate classic transducers, the MA-200 is a beast of its own. It works in all of the same applications that I'd use a U 67 but where I almost always end up boosting the top end and cutting some low mids of the 67, I find that the MA-200 rarely needs any EQ at all.

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**Key Features**

Cardioid pattern; 1-inch gold sputtered 3-micron diaphragm; tube electronics featuring military-grade JAN 5840 vacuum tubes; Jensen transformer

**Price**  
\$995

**Contact**  
Mojave Audio  
818-847-0222  
[www.mojaveaudio.com](http://www.mojaveaudio.com)

While recording drum kit I found that the MA-200s paired with a Manley Dual Vocal Combo work exceptionally well as overheads, beautifully capturing the sparkle of the cymbals. No equalization was required. I used the mic along with a Gordon mic preamp to record tambourine and shaker and had great results. Again, no equalization was needed. Later I used the pair of MA-200s to record congas (again with the Gordon mic preamps) and had great results as the mics provided a full, rich conga tone with no compromise to the instrument's attack.

The MA-200 really shines on acoustic guitar. I used it along with a Daking mic preamp and a Tube-Tech CL1B compressor to record a Taylor 514-CE and ended up with one of the finest acoustic sounds I've ever attained. I placed the mic about ten inches away from the guitar, slightly up the The MA-200 really shines on acoustic guitar. I used it along with a Daking mic preamp and a Tube-Tech CL1B compressor to record a Taylor 514-CE and ended up with one of the finest acoustic sounds I've ever attained. I placed the mic about ten inches away from the guitar, slightly up the neck but aimed back at the body and the sound was fantastic. I also had good results using the MA-200 to record a clean, chimy guitar through a Vox AC-30, but when it came to more distorted, aggressive guitar sounds, I prefer a Royer ribbon.

The mic does a wonderful job recording violin (I assume that this would also be the case for viola, cello). I found that if placed too close to the instrument it was slightly harsh and brittle, but — as long as the mic was 30 or more inches away — it sounded wonderful. In this instance I used it along with a John Hardy M1 mic preamp and the Tube-Tech CL1B.

A pair of MA-200s do a wonderful job recording grand piano. I used the mics in a spaced stereo configuration with one over the high strings and one over the low strings (with the mics about 4 inches off the strings) and ended up with a fantastic sound. I used a GML 8200 EQ to slightly compensate for the piano's darkness and I compressed the pair through a Pendulum Audio 6386 and the result was wonderful.

Even though the MA-200 does unusually well in so many areas, I think its true forte is recording vocals. I had wonderful results recording both male and female vocals. Male vocals sound full and rich and the mic does an outstanding job capturing more aggressive rock sounding vocals. Female vocals sound lush and smooth. They are slightly more susceptible to sibilance than some other mics but nothing that I wasn't able to cure with the addition of a dbx 902 into the signal chain. After every shootout, whether the MA-200 was selected or not, I felt that it completely held its own against mics costing several times as much.

My only real complaint about the MA-200 is its lack of selectable pickup patterns. After using it for several months I found that I occasionally would like to compare between different patterns but more often than not I've been able to get exactly what I need with the fixed cardioid pattern.

**Summary**

The Mojave Audio MA-200 is a wonderful sounding microphone that is well made, well packaged and unbelievably priced. It is a great consideration to any studio or engineer looking to broaden their sonic pallet.

Russ Long has done 5.1 DVD mixes for Allison Moorer and Mercy Me and is an in-demand engineer for live sound recordings, having multitracked live performances for Chris Tomlin, Lisa Loeb, Salvador, and Nichole Nordeman.

**Review Setup**

Apple Macintosh 2 GHz dual-processor G5 w/2 GB RAM; Digidesign Pro Tools 7.2; Lucid Gen-X-96 clock; Lynx Aurora converters; PMC AML-1 monitors.

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