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RECORDING

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REVIEW

In our January 2012 issue we looked at Mojave Audio's MA-300 large-diaphragm tube condenser microphone, the new multi-pattern version of Mojave's original cardioid-only MA-200 (reviewed January 2007). Similarly, the brand new MA-301fet under review today is the multi-pattern partner to Mojave's solid-state cardioid-only MA-201fet (reviewed December 2009). If you are unfamiliar with Mojave Audio, it is ribbon guru David Royer's other microphone company, home to all of his non-ribbon designs.



Presentation and build

The MA3-01fet is of overseas origin, and while this may seem like hyperbole, it truly does not look or feel like a "cheap Asian import" in any way. This is a solid, hefty microphone, and its $7\frac{5}{8}$ " x 2" brass body has an impeccable fit and finish inside and out. As you would expect, it comes as part of a kit that includes a black and silver aluminum briefcase and a suspension-style threaded shock mount.

Inside it is virtually the same as all of the other large-diaphragm condenser mics in the Mojave line, without the tubes. It has a dual-backplate, center-terminated K67 style capsule with a 1" gold sputtered, 3-micron thick dual diaphragm. It uses a military-grade FET circuit, custom designed low-noise resistors, and has a Jensen transformer output stage.



from the same cloth. Having the two capsules, one on top of the another and perfectly in phase, gave me a rare opportunity to truly hear the difference a tube makes in an otherwise near-identical design. Both mics exhibit a similar balanced sonic fingerprint, strong tight low end and solid open highs, with a slight mid dip.

In my MA-300 review I equated that model to a fine wine that was "robust and full-bodied with a smooth finish and slightly smoky signature." To describe the MA-301fet, simply remove the smoky top and some of the robustness in the lows and you have a FET microphone that is still full bodied and smooth. The MA-301fet is the more neutral sounding and less imposing of the two, but it stops short of being too clinical or vanilla. The best descriptive: natural with a slightly sweet top end.

Compared to my Brauner Phantom, a microphone that can be viewed as clinical sounding, the MA-

Mojave Audio MA-301fet

A solid-state version of this multipattern mic provides great sound at a great price

Family resemblance

A common theme at both Royer and Mojave is that essentially each line contains a signature microphone or two, and then all subsequent models are variants of that design. The MA-301 uses the same body, head amp, and Jensen transformer as the MA-201, and the same double-sided capsule as the MA-300. (Similarly, the MA-200 and MA-300 share the same head amp/tube stage and Jensen transformer.)

And just as the MA-300 extended upon the features of the MA-200, the new MA-301fet adds features beyond just the multiple pattern choices of figure-8, cardioid and omni. There is also a 15 dB attenuation pad and a 6 dB/octave highpass filter.

With a matte black body, white etched lettering and a black double mesh sloping grille, the MA-301fet looks almost exactly like the MA-201fet. The only difference is the addition of the three-position pattern-selector switch on the front just below the capsule, and the pad and filter switches on the rear.

Some specs

The MA-301fet has a standard 20 Hz to 20 kHz frequency response, and its specs differ only a dB or two from its cardioid version with a -40.5 dB sensitivity (ref. to 1V/Pa), 120 dB SPL (135 dB padded), and a self-noise of 14 dB nominal, not to exceed 16 dB (A-weighted).

If the frequency plots on the website are to be believed, interestingly the MA-301fet has slightly more in common sonically with the multi-pattern tube MA-300 than it does with the solid-state MA-201fet, with a slightly higher low-end response and a more natural and even high end. This most likely has to do with the double capsule and back plate design shared by the 300 and 301fet models.

The same but different

Graciously Mojave let me hang onto the previously reviewed MA-300 until completion of this review so I could test-drive them together, and indeed they are definitely cut

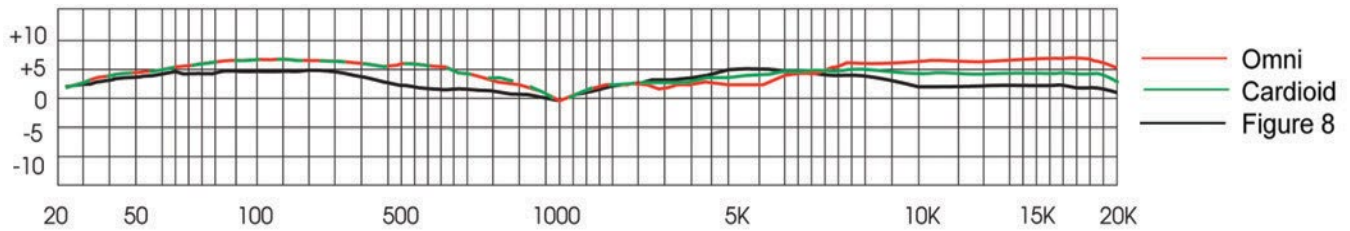
301fet was nowhere near as stark. Next to my Shure KSM44, I was surprised to find the two mics' upper midrange response to be similar, while the MA-301fet had a touch more low-mid oomph and its top end made the KSM44 seem slightly blunt by comparison.

In use

I know it may be boring when you read "this mic sounds good on pretty much everything", but Mojave has crafted an all-around champ and there is no source this mic won't tackle with ease.

It is a well-rounded vocal mic, equally at home on male and female vocals. It is well suited to everything from modern pop—where it can help sit the voice comfortably forward in the mix—all the way to smooth R&B and even jazzier leanings with a very natural tone.

It is also a good choice for clean, acoustic folk recording, on everything from vocals to steel-string guitar, fiddle



and percussion, especially when paired with one of the many "straight wire with gain" style preamps, in my case a Millennia HV-3D. In this instance it captures a nice "you are there" feel, but without sounding sterile.

On the rock side the MA-301fet is a really nice choice for electric guitar cabinets, and while it lacks the vibe and grit of the MA-300, it still works well since it allows the amp's tone to sail though but without the painfully bright high-frequency exaggeration that commonly makes me steer clear of LDC use on guitar cabinets.

Back in my MA-300 review you may remember that the one source where I found the MA-300 a tad too smoky was on drum overheads. In contrast, this may be one of the MA-301fet's strongest uses. On overheads, or as a mono front-of-kit mic about 6 feet back, it displayed an open and honest sound that still had enough silkiness in its highs to make the cymbals sound pleasant without too much eq or fuss in the final mix.

On kick and toms it can also be great choice, but here it is a case of the better the instrument and the tuning, the better your results will be. If you are looking to add punch and vibe, the MA-300 or the usual dynamic fare are probably a better choice.

Conclusions

While I love the MA-300 and its classic tube flavor, the MA-301fet is easily the most versatile and well-rounded of the Mojave line. This is one of those rare beasts that can do it all, do it well and do it with class. At \$895 (street) it easily competes with models costing \$500 to \$1000 more. The MA-301fet makes capturing a great performance on a good instrument easy! ➡

Price: \$895 (street)

More from: Mojave Audio, www.mojaveaudio.com