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REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Mojave Audio MA-50

A respected mic maker reaches a whole new audience

Mojave Audio started out in the Fullerton, CA, garage of famed microphone designer David Royer. While Royer Labs is David's outlet for his ribbon mic designs, Mojave handles his condenser creations. Mojave's mics have made quite an impression in just under a decade; many well-known engineers such as Sylvia Massy, Joe Barresi, and Ross Hogarth being fans. Other happy users include *Recording's* Editor At Large, Beto Hale, who sung the praises of Mojave's MA-200 tube mic on electric guitar cabinet in his July 2015 article "My Mics, My Sound".

Designed in the USA and manufactured overseas, Mojave Audio mics offer a lot of bang for the buck in both build quality and sonics. The cardioid MA-201fet, reviewed by Dave Martin back in December 2009, streets at \$695, and the multi-pattern MA-301fet that I reviewed in October of 2012 is \$895. This puts them on the "step-up" side of the microphone scale, and these are just the company's solid-state mics—their beautiful tube designs carry higher price tags. With that in mind, Mojave set out to build an entry-level solid-state Mojave mic and bring it in around \$445 street, perfect for project studios.

The result is the new MA-50. Unlike the 201fet and 301fet, it is a transformerless design. Mojave President and audio engineer Dusty Wakeman challenged David to design a transformerless circuit that did not sound brittle and sizzly, a common problem in many low-cost transformerless mics... and some mid-level mics, too.

Meet the MA-50

Starting with a good foundation, the MA-50 is built around the same cardioid capsule as is found in the MA-200 tube and MA-201fet models. It is a 3-micron thick 1" K67-style large-diaphragm capsule. This is married to what Mojave calls a "thoroughly modern, very low noise, transformerless circuit, designed to produce clarity and realism." Internally it is a very simple, minimal, and cleanly laid out design.

The MA-50 measures 7³/₈" by 2" and weighs 1 lb. It is housed in a thick, heavy black-coated brass body with a chrome mesh head basket. The mic also features the company's new look with a classy, red enamel Mojave badge. It comes in a standard kit with an aluminum flight case complete with a "vintage" Mojave luggage tag and a rubber-banded shock mount.

Facts and figures

Specs of the MA-50 include: 20 Hz–20 kHz (± 3 dB) frequency response, -40 dB (referenced to 1V/Pa) sensitivity, 140 dB maximum SPL, distortion of $<0.5\%$ @140 dB SPL, $<100 \Omega$ impedance, and <16 dBA self-noise.



Frequencywise the mic is surprisingly similar to the MA-201fet, being on the flatter and more neutral side. It has a slight low bump around 90 Hz, a quicker peak at 1.5 kHz, a 5 dB rise around 8 kHz to 18 kHz, and a gentle rolloff thereafter. Given this frequency response, it would appear that the MA-50 accomplishes David's goal of avoiding stridency and sizzle.

Sound

So, how did the MA-50 fare in my studio? First of all, I can say that the MA-50 is on the clean, open and natural side, but it is not harsh or spitty at all. It's not billed as a clone of any particular mic, but to my ears it does fall more in the U87 world than, say, an AKG C414 or anything vintage/tube in nature.

It does lack the transformed sonic weight of its big brothers, for obvious reasons. As such, it gently tilts a little more to the vanilla side of the solid-state scale with less sonic girth than the MA-201fet.

In use

Before you shy away from the use of the word "vanilla"—for a small studio, this can be a great thing! It allows this mic to do many things well. Compared to many of today's ultra-transparent or heavily vibey mics, it's good to have a solid, affordable mic that falls in the middle and can be a true workhorse.

In session, I found the MA-50 to do a formidable job on drum overheads, percussion duties, piano, and acoustic guitar as well. It helps vocals cut nicely through a mix without being shrill or unpleasant, and it's also adept at voiceover work, with just enough proximity effect to fill out the voice nicely, but not so much as to be thick or dense. A pair of MA-50s also work well as affordable "set it and forget it" room mics.

About the only source that I did not enjoy the MA-50 on was electric guitar cabinet. There, I did miss the transformer weight of the MA-201fet, or better still, the tube tone of the MA-200.

Conclusion

With this remarkable little mic, Mojave has done a great job of achieving its dual goals of previously-untouched price point and beautifully flexible sound. At under \$450, the MA-50 will be a great choice for anyone wanting an affordable sonic step up from the world of \$100 and \$200 beginner mics. ➤

Price: \$445

More from: Mojave Audio,
www.mojaveaudio.com

