

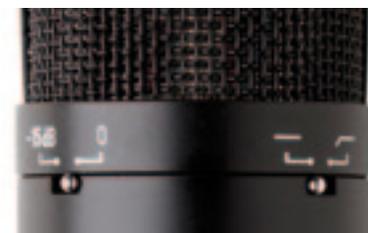
Mojave Audio MA-301FET

This US-based brand has achieved a gradual but lasting rise in acceptance among microphone cognoscenti. **JON THORNTON** rates the latest multipattern highly.

Mojave Audio (or David Royer's capacitor mic division, as I like to think of it) has seen its designs gain an increasing amount of traction. The 201FET, fixed pattern large diaphragm condenser has impressed mightily since its introduction, and so perhaps it's not surprising that the 301FET (about US\$900) adds some multipattern action to the FET-based product line. After all, why should the valve designs have all the fun? This new addition looks very much part of the family, sharing the now familiar construction of a chunky tubular body topped by a fairly wide spaced mesh grille. The whole article is finished in black with white engraving, and succeeds in looking reassuringly classic and purposefully modern at the same time. It ships in a neat little hard case, together with a nicely finished metal and elastic shockmount. The whole assembly is weightier than its relatively compact size would suggest, but nothing that will tax most good mic stands.

Internally there's a dual, 1-inch centre terminated diaphragm assembly, mated to discrete electronics split across two single sided PCBs. Military grade FETs and custom low-noise resistors are employed here, together with a Jensen output transformer bolted to the base of the chassis. This approach to component quality permeates right through the design, even to the shockmount. Mojave has taken a manufacturing approach here that strikes an interesting balance. Key components are gathered at the Burbank HQ, and then sent offshore for final assembly. Completed units are then returned to HQ for final soak testing, quality control and packing. All of which results in a price/performance ratio that's pretty compelling for a relatively low volume manufacturer.

Polar pattern is selected by a three-position toggle switch located at the 'front' of the microphone and omni, fig-8 and cardioid patterns are on offer here. Two additional toggle switches at the rear give a -15dB pad and a high pass filter (6dB/octave below 100Hz) — all pretty standard stuff for what is clearly designed to be a no-nonsense studio workhorse. So it makes sense to



put it up against the Austrian and German equivalents, in the form of a Neumann U87Ai and an AKG C414 (the older B-ULS variant with transformer output).

First impressions, with all microphones set on their cardioid pattern and with spoken voice as the source, is that the MA-301FET sits squarely between the two in terms of overall sonics. It has a bit more 'bite', certainly in the high mids than the U87, while not being quite as glassy as the 414. And at the low end it doesn't quite have the reach and depth of the 414, but sounds a little fuller and rounder. Off-axis response is progressive and smooth in cardioid mode, but proximity effect is quite pronounced and fairly sudden as working distance decreases — certainly a little less progressive than the U87 here. When switching to sung (female) vocals, the MA-301's response works in its favour. It will always come down to personal taste, and while the U87 seems to deliver a little more warmth to the mid-range, the MA-301 sounds a little more open and airy, slightly harder edged sound.

Switching all three to their omni pattern, moving to acoustic guitar, and the venerable Austrian sets the bar, at least to my ears. In fairness, all three microphones do a very credible job, but it's the 414 that sounds most natural and balanced, with the MA-301 sounding a tiny bit more jangly than either of the other two. Back to cardioid, and up close (well, close-ish) and personal on an Orange Tiny Terror cab and the pendulum swings back to the Mojave contender. A nice full sound with plenty of definition and bite but without the harshness that the 414 seems to pull out here. The U87 works well too, but seems to soften the sound a little more; again, it's a genre and taste issue as much as anything.

As single overhead mics on drums, there's little to choose between them. If anything, the MA-301 seems the more focussed and forward of the three, lifting the initial snap of the snare and transients of the cymbals out of the balance slightly. And the 414 needs a touch of high pass filtering here to avoid becoming too ponderous sounding.

The story here for the MA-301, if you hadn't guessed, is of an



extremely well judged and executed microphone. That my own preference switched fairly evenly between all three microphones in different applications is probably the biggest endorsement you can give it. The MA-301 more than holds its head up against those venerable benchmarks and sits happily between them in terms of sound, which is good news for all concerned. If you already possess either or both of the European contingent, Mojave Audio's offering brings something new to the party. And if you have neither, it offers a real alternative that sits happily between the two. ■

PROS

Solid build and performance; a good modern take on classic FET designs; works well across a range of applications; price.

CONS

Could sound a little too 'forward' for some applications; that's about it...

EXTRAS

The Mojave MA-101SP is a matched pair of MA-101FET cardioid condenser microphones. The microphones' FET circuitry and externally polarised capacitor mic elements deliver low noise and feature omni and cardioid polar patterns by way of interchangeable capsules.



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