



PRODUCT SUMMARY

BLUE

THE BALL > \$279

Pros: Versatile. Sturdy construction. Great for beginning recordists.

Cons: Not suitable for all vocal applications.

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RETHINKING DYNAMICS > The Ball's phantom-powered design (a first for a dynamic mic) delivers a frequency response of 35 Hz to 16 kHz.

BLUE THE BALL

A NEW TWIST ON AN OLD MIC DESIGN

BY ROBERT HANSON

> Unless this is the first time you've ever picked up a magazine like *Remix*, the thought of Blue microphones should immediately conjure images of some twisted-looking high-end recording mics that are probably out of your price range. Well, salivate no longer. At this year's Winter NAMM show, Blue caused quite a stir with its latest offering, The Ball. Touted as the world's first phantom-powered dynamic, The Ball is priced at a point that should make it affordable for practically anyone.

With the project-studio crowd in its sights, the company designed The Ball for use in nearly any application that requires a dynamic mic. The mic is equally at home inside of a kick drum or behind a pop screen. And because The Ball is a dynamic mic, it can withstand extremely high SPLs, making it a perfect choice for those who are making their first significant inroads into home recording.

BUST THE NUT

The Ball is constructed out of a sturdy, high-impact plastic shell. The internal electronic components and the capsule are securely nestled inside a thick layer of foam that is surrounded by a blue shell. The mic affixes to any standard mic stand and swivels up and down for proper alignment.

The mic is built around a Class A discrete amplifier circuit that is designed to ensure a consistent 50-ohm load across the usable frequency spectrum. Normal dynamic mics simply use an electromagnetic transducer that creates its own output voltage at varying levels across the audible range. The Ball's phantom-powered design alleviates that variance by deriving its voltage from an outside source—in this case, a mic pre or console with +48V phantom power.

So why is that important? The Ball's design, in theory, delivers the best of both worlds. On the one hand, you have the ease of use of a dynamic mic, which is easy to set up and generally quite sturdy. And on the other hand, The Ball deliv-

ers the flat response of a large-diaphragm condenser. Think of it in terms of a luxury SUV: You can push through a foot of snow, like with a real truck, all while enjoying dual-zone climate control and sipping a latte.

PLAY BALL

In testing, I sought to duplicate some real-world conditions. Many of the people who are likely to buy The Ball are not the types who own \$2,000 preamps; to allow for that, I started by plugging The Ball directly into the modest preamps on a Tascam TM-D1000 digital mixer. I tested the mic on vocals, guitars and some odd percussion elements.

On vocals, the mic initially behaved like most dynamics, producing a clear and straightforward signal. When I soloed the vocal tracks, however, and really put things under the microscope, I noticed The Ball sounding a little like it's built: The vocals sounded slightly like they do when performers cup the mic in their hands. There is a noticeable bump in the upper mids with the highs rolling off fairly sharply. For softly spoken, breathy vocal passages, The Ball might not be my first choice. But if you need vocals that will cut through a thick, screaming track and your vocalist has the pipes to match, The Ball would work quite well.

On a Marshall 2x10 guitar amp, The Ball was, ahem, a ball to use. The mic was perfect for capturing some meaty, overdriven lead lines played from a Gibson SG. As a basic utility mic, The Ball also performed famously. I used it to mike some weird bits of percussion around the house (think pots and pans), and it captured those sources extremely well. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to try the mic on acoustic drums, but after becoming fairly familiar with the mic's overall character, I'd put it on a kick drum without hesitation. All in all, The Ball is a solid addition to any mic locker, and it's a welcome improvement to the world of dynamic mics. 