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# Lauten Audio LS-208

*An innovative new mic series launches with a flexible front-address condenser*



## REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Lauten Audio crafts microphones with topnotch build quality that are sonically and often visually unique—no design is a clone of any classic mic. With the solid-state FC-387 Atlantis (reviewed January 2013) and tube LT-386 Eden (reviewed May 2017), Lauten has created microphones that offer multiple voicing options, essentially like having multiple mics in a single body. More recently, Lauten has turned its attention to their entry-level Series Black models.

More than once I have found myself asking, “Where does a company go after the Eden and Atlantis?” The answer has arrived with the launch of the company’s new Synergy Series, which kicks off with the new LS-208. True to its name, the mic contains multiple attributes that combine to create another unique Lauten design.

## Meet the LS-208

The LS-208 is a front-address large-diaphragm condenser microphone, finished in matte black with the standard red Lauten enamel badge. It measures 7.5" by 1.98" in diameter, and despite being an end-address microphone with a slightly smaller body profile than your typical LDC microphone, it is not simply an oversized pencil condenser.

Its head basket assembly holds a 1" center-terminated capsule with a gold-sputtered diaphragm. Although it is listed as a cardioid mic, its pattern is slightly tighter than what you would expect in a typical cardioid.

The head basket assembly features a 3/4" domed metal mesh grille above the capsule that is very open. Just below it, about 1/2" down, is a second tighter domed layer of mesh, just above the diaphragm and capsule of the microphone. Behind the capsule is a 1" open-screened air gap. This design gives the LS-208 excellent plosive control, and also works with the microphone’s internal circuitry to give the microphone an impressive 135 dB dynamic range.

## Specs and switches

Internally the mic is built around a JFET transistor with a transformer-balanced output. In addition to its 135 dB dynamic

range, its specs are: >150Ω impedance, >135 dB SPL handling (0.5% THD @1000 Hz), self-noise < 15 dBA, and sensitivity of 5mV/Pa -46 dBV (0 dB=1V/Pa @1 kHz).

It has a 20 Hz–20 kHz frequency response. Looking at the frequency plot, it starts rolled off from 20 Hz up to 60 Hz, then remains generally neutral from 60–4000 Hz with some slight 1 dB variations up and down. Its most extreme rise is 3 dB up centered on 6.5 kHz, with another 2 dB bump at 12 kHz. This suggests that the mic should sound very natural, with controlled low end and a slight top-end boost. However, this is only part of the story, as the LS-208 continues Lauten’s recent tradition of multiple voicing choices.

The voice options for the LS-208 include a pair of independent 2-stage low- and highpass filter circuits on a pair of 3-way switches below the head basket. The highpass/lowcut filter offers a choice of 50 Hz or 120 Hz cuts, and the lowpass/highcut filter offers 8 kHz or 10 kHz. They let you tailor the high and low end to lessen bass buildup and/or round and smooth out the top. Both circuits are well implemented and never sound overdone.

The LS-208 comes in a compact, robust hard foam-lined carry case and includes a foam windscreen, a hard mic mount, and a broadcast/yoke-style shockmount. The latter hints at one of the mic’s intended uses: as a podcast/radio/broadcast/voiceover mic.

## Get close... no, get closer!

When treated like a typical large-diaphragm condenser, the LS-208 offers a gentle, natural, yet treble-forward modern condenser sound. This is especially true when used at distances of 4–6" or more on sources at average volume.

Where the LS-208 really comes alive is up close on a source, and/or on louder instruments. What is not shown by its frequency plot is that this microphone has a fantastic, full proximity effect that blooms nicely from 3 inches... or better yet, *no* inches. This mic really loves close-up vocals, just like one would get from a handheld dynamic mic. It also loves screaming guitar cabinets and being right up on drum heads.

In use, the proximity effect gives you the instant radio announcer voice or bold sung vocal tracks that can be open

and modern. If you get right up close and “eat the mic”, then switch in some highcut filter, you get an intimate vocal with a round warm thickness.

This is a condenser mic that is happy to be used where you might normally grab an Electro-Voice RE20 or a Shure SM7B. While both of those are dynamic mics, the LS-208 hangs with them well. It is darn near impossible to clip or distort the capsule, and while this may sound like hyperbole, I found the mic almost *completely* immune to vocal plosives.

### Kick it

Thanks to this, the LS-208 is one of the few condenser microphones I have ever been able to stick in the port hole of a kick drum where the air blasts did not “fart out” the capsule. Again, thanks to its filter choices, it is nicely adjustable for great full kick drum tones.

Similarly the mic is great on snare and toms, also because of its ultra-tight off-axis rejection. It does not cut the

sound completely, but it drops adjacent cymbals, toms, and hi-hat to a much more manageable level that still sounds natural.

### Crank it

Finally, I was very impressed with the LS-208 on loud guitar cabinets in all styles from clean and jazzy to full-on screaming metal. Thanks again to its controllable proximity effect and filters, I found myself not needing to add a second mic as I might typically do with the average dynamic. It’s also very adept at bass cabinet miking, with a tight thick sound.

The only places I would not use the LS-208 would be on cymbal overheads, room miking, or as a distant mic on acoustic instruments. This mic is happiest up close, and there are plenty of other microphones in Lauten’s line up for spacial duties.

### Try it!

Once again Lauten impresses by offering a mic that does things its own way with its own sound. It’s a condenser mic that plays by its own rules, and is happy to

live where we might previously have favored a dynamic mic. I truly think in the next few years the LS-208 could set new standards for voiceover, drums, and electric guitar use.

As for the Synergy Series, there are more mics to come, and I’ve already started working with the equally innovative LS-308. Look for a review soon! ➤

