

Lauten Series Black LA-220 £239

Lauten Audio drop three new mid-price mics as 'Series Black'. **Robbie Stamp** tries out the FET condenser model

CONTACT WHO: Synthax **TEL:** +44 (0)1727 821 870 **WEB:** www.lautenaudio.com
KEY FEATURES **POLAR PATTERN:** cardioid **CAPSULE:** 25.4mm (1") dual diaphragm **CIRCUIT:** JFET transistor with transformer balanced output **SENSITIVITY:** 16mV/Pa (-40dBV) **OUTPUT IMPEDANCE:** <200 **FEATURES:** 120Hz low-cut and 12kHz high-cut filters



The LA-220 is flanked in the Series Black range by a small diaphragm condenser stereo pair and a valve condenser, all of which are eminently affordable. This does put them in a fierce and overcrowded market, but Lauten, with their Signature Series mics, have built a reputation that should give this range a head start. The LA-220 is fairly light and slim for a large diaphragm condenser, which is a good thing for mic stand and placement options (it comes with a standard shockmount cradle).

Versatile mic

The 1-inch dual diaphragm capsule is amplified by a JFET (Junction Field Effect Transistor)-based discrete circuit which terminates in a balancing transformer; a nice combination at this price. FETs were the first solid state components used to replace valves and have continued in this role to mimic some of their characteristics (especially with regard to harmonic distortion). An output transformer can also be a source of colouration and character, as opposed to the clean transparency promised by transformerless topologies (it doesn't always pan out like that though).

The LA-220 presents a natural and well-balanced mid range, and this in turn delivers vocal and instrument sources in a mix-ready form that many mics at this end of the market fail to. The high-end possesses the bright detail you expect from a condenser with a

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relatively smooth rise into this region, avoiding the harsh narrow response peaks cheap designs often throw up. At the low-end there is plenty of heft without impinging on the upper bass region, so this will rock a bass but not cover it in wool.

All this can be reined in with the low-cut switch (120Hz cutoff), which is accompanied by the more rare high-cut control (12kHz cutoff). The high-cut filter may see less action than its lower frequency sibling, but it is a welcome addition for keeping harsh cymbals, scratchy acoustic guitars and high-sibilant vocals in check. Married to the quality mid-range response this all adds up to a versatile microphone.

Great sound

The balanced clarity of the LA-220 comes with a healthy output level and appreciably low/well-shaped noise. Though this is a 'clean', not overtly colourful mic, it does not come off as clinical or in any way harsh, but rather a natural window on the source. It sounds great on everything I tried, and though different from the mics I set it up with, many times I couldn't necessarily say it was better/worse – just different. The closest

example in terms of price and design fared worse than the LA-220 on most sources (only drew level on a guitar amp); whereas the LA-220 gave the £2k valve condenser a damn good run across the board.

The LA-220 is an excellent value mic and will provide quality results for recording novices and pros alike. It can be reliably leaned on for a single mic set-up as well as fitting easily into a larger multi-mic studio setting. The dual low-cut and high-cut filters make it especially useful in the latter context, as setting tone at source reduces phase problems down the line – essential to quality recordings. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.8

An affordable format that doesn't compromise sonic integrity, the LA-220 is a seriously flexible mic at a seriously attractive price

THE PROS & CONS

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Natural clarity without sounding clinical or harsh

High-cut and low-cut filter switches

High output level coupled with low self noise

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No pad control