



# Lauten Audio LS-208 & LS-308

## Capacitor Microphones

These intriguing new mics are designed for loud environments where spill is an issue — so that's exactly where we tested them!

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California company Lauten Audio launched their first microphone back in 2006. Since then, they have built up a varied range of capacitor mic designs which includes a selection of large-diaphragm tube and FET mics, as well as a small-diaphragm 'pencil mic' option. The vibe is very much of a boutique company doing their

own thing, and that was certainly my overriding impression when I got my hands on the two microphone models reviewed here.

The LS-208 and the LS-308 are capacitor microphones designed for use in challenging situations. Very high SPL handling, strong off-axis rejection and a variety of onboard low- and high-pass filters suggest a lot of potential roles for both live as well as in the studio. Both

**Lauten Audio LS-208**  
**\$599 & LS-308 \$499**

### PROS

- Excellent SPL handling on both models.
- Both mics are solid, well built and have good mounting options.
- LS-308 offers very high levels of rear and side rejection.
- LS-208 sounds excellent on loud amps, close drums and live vocals.

### CONS

- High-frequency roll-off starts around 7kHz on the LS-308.
- LS-308 may be a little pricey for a specialist mic.

### SUMMARY

Lauten Audio have produced two new microphone models that can excel in challenging recording environments. The LS-208 is a great all-round option for close instrument and voice recording, and the LS-308 offers very high levels of SPL handling and rejection which make it able to capture direct sound in very demanding situations.

models have simple black styling and come in a no-frills hard case with some well-thought-out mounting options. They feel solid and well built, and I found them very easy to use.

## LS-208

Looking at the LS-208 first, Lauten themselves describe the mic as a “professional front-address large-diaphragm condenser voice and instrument microphone that brings brilliance and expressiveness to broadcast, sound reinforcement, podcasting and studio recording”. When fitted into its shockmount, it looks like a mic you might expect to see in a broadcast or podcast session, but I found it very useful for music recording too. This is partly because of its ability to cope with levels up to 135dB SPL (for 0.5 percent THD at 1kHz) without a pad. The first time I used the LS-208 was in front of an extremely loud bass cab, and the results were very impressive indeed. A full, smooth bass sound was captured, and it felt like the mic was handling all the bottom end with ease.

As I had two of these mics to play with, I used them next as snare top and bottom mics. I know bottom snare is not an application that will get many people excited, but it really revealed how good the mic is at rejecting what is behind the capsule. If you check out my audio examples at <https://sosm.ag/lauten-ls-audio> you can hear for yourself just how well it performs in this respect. It also worked really well as a top snare mic, and did a great job of rejecting the hi-hats whilst still capturing a full snare sound, with more top end than you would expect from the usual moving-coil dynamic mic options. It is quite a large mic for this application, however, and there’s a risk that heavy-hitting drummers might give it a whack mid-take.

I also used the LS-208 in front of a trumpet, where, again, I could place it as close as I liked without having to worry about switching in a pad. This application made apparent the mic’s presence peak at around 6.5kHz, and this worked well in conjunction with a darker-sounding ribbon

### Alternatives

I’m struggling to think of many capacitor-mic alternatives, but for close-up work and high-SPL applications, the dynamic **Shure SM7b** and **Electro-Voice RE20** may be worth considering.



The LS-308 is put to work as an outside-kick mic.

mic I had positioned a bit further back.

There’s one singer we record a lot at our studio who has a very loud voice that can make some capacitor mics in our collection distort, but the LS-208 was clear and full-sounding — slightly mid-forward and very usable indeed.

I used it on another session to track a guide vocal, with the singer positioned very close to a full drum kit, and the off-axis rejection was impressive. Naturally, there was still some drum sound spilling into the microphone, but I would have had no problem at all if the singer had wanted to keep the guide vocal. I was also struck by the way the mic captured the low end of the singer’s voice. He was singing very close to the capsule, and the proximity effect helped round out his voice in a pleasing way.

I should make a quick mention of the onboard filters on the mic, as they are quite comprehensive: 50 and 120 Hz high-pass options are included, as well as slightly more unusual 8 or 10 kHz low-pass filters, adding even more flexibility to what is already an impressive ‘Swiss Army’ mic. You would be very glad you

had packed an LS-208 if you were doing any kind of live or location recording, and it won’t gather much dust in the studio either.

## LS-308

Moving on to the LS-308, Lauten describe it as a problem-solver that has been specifically designed to have extreme side and rear rejection and, again, to handle loud sources. Like the LS-208, this mic can accept 135dB SPL without a pad, but the spec also states that it has a “second-order cardioid” polar pattern that offers up to 25dB attenuation throughout a 270-degree arc. The description suggests that this is achieved using back-to-back capsules, which would explain the mic’s ‘hammerhead’ appearance. It’s a pattern that has obvious benefits, but the physics of the design mean its frequency response begins to roll off at 7kHz. The mic comes fitted with a swing-arm mount; this worked very well, but is also removable, and a standard hard mount is included with the package. The combination of high SPL handling and tight polar pattern has implications for

The LS-208 worked well on snare, providing a very useful amount of hi-hat rejection.

» positioning — indeed, Lauten specifically advise you to forget what you know about mic placement when using the LS-308.

I had three of these mics to play with, and the first time I put them to use was on a drum recording session. I decided I'd use LS-308s on the rack and floor toms and as an outside kick microphone. As a useful point of reference, I also set up a Sennheiser MD421 next to the LS-308 on the floor tom. The 421 is pretty much as close as you can get to an 'industry standard' for tom miking so I thought it would be a useful comparison. Comparing them directly is difficult, of course, as the 308 definitely favoured non-standard mic positioning.

Placing them side by side, just above the drum rim, it was immediately noticeable just how isolated the toms were from the nearby cymbals, but in this position the 308 was noticeably darker-sounding than the 421. The LS-308 features the same onboard filter options as the LS-208, and engaging the 50Hz high-pass filter seemed to help sharpen things up, as well as reducing some low-frequency sounds coming from the ride cymbal.

Because of the amount of rejection available, I was able to position the mics either a bit further away from the drums than you might normally, or in more hard-to-reach places under cymbals and so on. The resulting sounds were very usable, and confirmed Lauten's advice about ignoring traditional positioning.

One of the applications that Lauten suggest for the LS-308 is recording a live band in a smaller room. With this in mind I set up a simple live session with drums, guitar and bass guitar in the same room, amps included. I placed mics close to the speaker on both the guitar and bass amps and another outside the kick drum. The results were very impressive from



a rejection point of view, especially on the bass amp, where the 308 was only a few feet from the drums. It really does do what it says on the tin! On guitar amp, the story was the same, but you might want to add another mic if you need a bit

it would work as well in this setting as it did in front of a bass cab, guitar cab and as a close snare-drum microphone. A microphone that combines very good off-axis rejection with clarity even on loud sources is a useful tool indeed.

The LS-308 is exactly what Lauten say it is: a problem solver. Some may feel it's a lot to invest in a mic that does not have universal applications, and it isn't the brightest mic out

**"If you work on heavy, loud genres and have to mic quite 'busy' drum kits, the LS-308 could be very handy indeed."**

there, but for live band recording it works very well, even in a small live room. We do a bit of live video/session recording at our studio, and I think these mics would be perfect for that. I also think that if you work in heavy, loud genres and have to mic quite 'busy' drum kits, the LS-308 could be very handy indeed. Both mics are sturdy, come as well-thought-out packages and offer lots of potential uses both in the studio and on the stage. ■■■

more top end. With the outside kick, I got a solid kick-drum sound with minimal spill, but once again, you have to forget some of your go-to mic placements and experiment a little. I found a sweet spot for the outside kick, for example, by having the LS-308 about a foot back from the resonant head.

### Summing Up

These are not necessarily microphones to wow your clients with, but they are both very useful and really quite original, which is no mean feat these days. The LS-208 is one of the more flexible mics I've come across. I didn't get a chance to try it in a podcast-type setup, but I think

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