

by Mitch Gallagher

# Blue The Ball

Phantom power — on a dynamic mic?

**Type:** Large-diaphragm dynamic mic with active electronics

**Price:** \$279

**Contact:** Blue Microphones,  
[www.bluemic.com](http://www.bluemic.com)

**Capsule:** Large-diaphragm

**Polar pattern:** Cardioid

**Electronics:** Phantom-powered Class-A

**Frequency response:** 35 Hz to 16 kHz

**Noise:** 17 dB, A-weighted

**Maximum SPL:** 162 dB

**GREAT BALLS OF FIRE!**  
WITH ITS SOFTBALL FORM  
FACTOR, ACTIVE ELECTRONICS,  
AND INTEGRAL SWIVEL MOUNT,  
THE BALL HANDILY WINS THE  
AWARD FOR UNIQUE  
MIC DESIGN OF  
THE YEAR.



**THERE'S MORE TO THE BALL**  
THAN ITS SPHERICAL SHAPE.  
INSIDE IT FEATURES PHANTOM-  
POWERED CLASS-A ELECTRON-  
ICS, WHICH ARE USED TO  
MAINTAIN CONSTANT IMPED-  
ANCE LOAD ON THE CAPSULE.



Lately it seems there's a new must-have condenser mic hitting the market almost daily. Dynamics, on the other hand, haven't seen as much action. With The Ball, Blue Microphones has swung the balance back toward dynamics.

Clearly the most distinctive feature of The Ball is its physical shape — the thing looks like a blue softball. It's sure to elicit comments when clients and studio visitors see it. The only problem is what to do with the thing when you're not using it. No case is provided, and I lived in fear that it would roll off whatever shelf or tabletop I set it on. (Blue says that the Ball's ABS plastic shell is nearly indestructible.)

The shape also hides some function; the XLR connector is on the rear, as you'd expect, but built into the mic body is a mount for attaching The Ball to a mic stand. The mount pivots forward and back for adjusting the angle of The Ball, although I found the range of movement to be too short for some applications. For vocal use, for example, you won't be able to use a boom stand; you'll need a straight mic stand.

Once you're past The Ball's appearance, you can dive into what really sets it apart — phantom-powered electronics. No typos there, you need phantom power to run the Ball.

The Ball's electronics are designed to isolate the mic from the effects of impedance. Blue explains that when you plug a dynamic mic into a fixed-impedance preamp, you create a resistive load that varies with frequency, resulting in

sonic changes. The Ball addresses this problem with a Class-A discrete amplifier that maintains a constant 50-ohm load across the frequency spectrum. As a gross test of this, I plugged The Ball, along with several "normal" dynamic mics, into a Focusrite ISA428 preamp (see review on page 78). I recorded the same re-amped guitar passage into each mic at each of the 428's four impedance settings. With the "normal" dynamic mics, there were substantial tonal and level shifts as the impedance was changed. With The Ball, the effects were far less dramatic; level remained constant as impedance changed, and tonal changes were subtle. Under regular circumstances, impedance variances are minute compared to this test, but it does illustrate how well isolated The Ball is from the effects of loading.

## IN USE

The Ball can withstand substantial sound pressure without caving — it specs at up to 162 dB SPL. I didn't have a jet engine handy to test this claim, but I will say The Ball remained unstrained on any source I stuck it in front of.

The sound of The Ball can be described as "dynamic mic plus." It has the punchy characteristics I associate with a good dynamic, but it has fatter lower-mids, solid low end, and a smooth top — it made some of the other dynamics sound thin by comparison.

The Ball excelled anywhere you'd use a standard dynamic: electric guitars, bass amp, percussion. I also used The Ball to record male vocals. The sound was full and present, although those accustomed to the fizzy top end of modern

condensers won't find it here. The Ball's top end is warmer and less hyped. Proximity effect was controlled, and off-axis rejection of unwanted sound was good.

I was especially fond of The Ball on my 4x12 Marshall cabinet recording distorted rhythm tracks. It provided smoother, less "clinical" top end than a condenser, and had a fat, punchy midrange crunch.

You can also use The Ball on other sources, ones that you wouldn't "traditionally" use a dynamic mic to track. I tried it on steel-string acoustic guitar, for example. While I still prefer a nice condenser on delicate fingerpicked passages, for hard-strummed rhythms, The Ball delivered a punchy, driving sound.

With The Ball, Blue has successfully created a new hybrid: the phantom-powered dynamic mic. For studio or live use, the result is a stable, versatile, fat-sounding mic with a lot of punch and drive that can be used on a wide variety of sources. Best of all, the price is low enough that you can stock up — enough Balls to mic a drum kit won't set you back as much as a single high-end condenser mic. Plus, you can use them to practice juggling between sessions. . . . **EQ**

## Strengths:

- Punchy midrange, chunky lows, clear highs
- Integral swivel/stand mount
- High SPL handling
- Looks too cool
- Isolated from loading effects

## Limitations:

- No case
- Limited range of swivel mount movement