



BY PAUL VNUK JR.

In October 2011 we took a look at Millennium Media's HV-35 500 Series microphone preamp. The HV-35 was based upon the design of the company's legendary HV-3 mic preamp, now in its 22nd year of existence. For most of those years, the HV-3 microphone preamp was available in 2, 4 and 8-channel configurations, and could also be found in the company's STT-1 Origin Channel strip and the TD-1 Half Rack Recording Channel.

Since 2011, the HV-35 version has spawned a whole series of related products. We reviewed the 2-channel 19"



Millennia Media HV-35P & HV-32P

rackmount HV-37 in July 2013, and there's even a stripped-down miniature version crafted for use in API's 200 Series format, dubbed the HV-32. Today we are looking at two new HV units that build upon all of the above experience; they're Millennium's most portable HV preamps to date.

The HV-3: a brief history

The origins of the HV-3 date back to the early 1990s, when most microphone preamps were typically found in large recording desks and the standalone/rackmount mic pre as a "thing" was in its infancy. Most desks of the time, from MCI, Neve, API, SSL, and others, each offered a signature sound that studios often built their reputations around. By contrast, Millennium's founder John LaGrou wanted a preamp that was as transparent as possible and suited for use in the location recording of classical and jazz ensembles. Out of necessity, he built his own. As his friends and other engineers heard John's creation, both a company and a product line were born.

As we pointed out in our HV-37 review, *Recording* was lucky enough to be the very first magazine to review John's original creation back in 1993, although at the time we were still going by the name *Home & Studio Recording*. Now, over 35,000 HV channels later, the rest is history.

The sonic signature of Millennium's HV-3 preamp is well engrained in the recording world. These were among the first in the class of preamps described as "straight wire with gain"—clean, open, pure, and honest. They are designed with the philosophy that you will hear the tone of your

The clarity of Millenia preamplification—grab it and go

source and the microphone, rather than the preamp. Having said that, however, as this category has grown over the years, the HV-3 has stood out with its own gentle signature, most notably a crystalline top end that is glassy, yet polished and hi-fi. This helps it stand out among much of its competition, which can often sound clinical by comparison.

Modular goes mobile

The new HV models are variants of the 500 Series HV-35 and the 200 Series HV-32. Each unit's look, layout and functionality is similar to the modular versions, but instead of requiring a 200/500 Series enclosure, each unit is nestled in a rugged but ultralight aluminum housing with its own external 10–15V DC line lump power supply.

Both models measure 1.69" high, 5.67" deep and 8.19" wide, and weigh only 2 lbs. They have a protruding aluminum top and bottom plate that sticks out on the front of each unit by 3/4" for the purpose of protecting each unit's controls, a design feature first popularized on Radial Engineering's direct boxes. The top and bottom plates are silver and the inner unit is finished in black, in an anodized bead-blast finish different than the brushed finish of the HV-32/35/37.

Each unit is highly portable and can slip easily into a backpack or computer case; up to three units can be mounted side-by-side on a standard Middle Atlantic rack shelf, thanks to pre-drilled screw holes on the bottom of each box.

Controls and functions

Functionally, each unit is identical to its 200/500 Series counterpart, with the same black gain knob and backlit jewel-toned push buttons. The HV-35P is a single channel unit and offers the most features of the two. It offers a –14 dB Pad, Polarity Flip, +48V Phantom Power, a +10 dB Ribbon Switch, a –3 dB @ 80 Hz High Pass Filter, and a switchable Hi-Z Instrument input whose 1/4" jack is located on the front. It also has a small black knurled variable Gain knob with a throw from 15 dB up to 60 dB, unmarked except for small white dots which are essentially 4.5 dB steps. Lastly it has a front-panel power switch with a red power LED, as well as a pair of green and red signal/clip LEDs. Around the back are a single XLR in and out.

The HV-32P is a 2-channel unit, a pair of HV-32s in one box. It is a simpler box—each channel has a Gain control, –14 dB Pad, +48V Phantom Power switch, and +10 dB Ribbon Switch. It also has a front power switch, and it expands its input metering with three marked signal/clip LEDs: –30 dB green, +8 dB yellow and +20 dB red. The rear has two XLR ins and outs.

In use

This is essentially the third time I have reviewed this preamp, and I must also disclose that I own and have been using an 8-Channel HV-3D for well over 12 years now... it's a sound I know well and really appreciate. Everything that I used to describe the HV-3 sound above holds true to these new HVP models, and while there are some spec differences between the older HV-3 and these,

in use my ears cannot detect a difference except at the hottest of levels.

At the outer extreme of its gain control range, as is the case with any mic preamp, the HVP models do exhibit a slightly increased noise floor. In my tests, however, that noise goes away when you back down the gain knob and engage the +10 ribbon switch. This feature is made, of course, for ribbon mics as well as low-output dynamic mics like Shure's SM7 and SM57 (both of which sound great on these pres). As a safety feature, when engaged, the ribbon switch blocks phantom power so as to protect older ribbon microphones. Essentially, other than when they're pushed to the very limit to compensate for what would need to be a *really* low-output microphone, these units are clean as a whistle. An additional great feature is that there is a slight mute and delay when engaging and disengaging controls. That keeps signals from popping and thumping like many preamps do.

Lastly, when reviewing a Millennia Pre, I like to remind readers that while the HV Series preamps are in no way vibey or colored, they can yield very vibey results if you use a colored vibey microphone or track a vibey source! All this to say: don't be tempted to pigeonhole preamps like this into the jazz, classical, and folk camps. I have used them often on hard rock, metal, and punk sessions, with great sounding and ultra-honest results.

Which is best for you?

With three models of HV-3 and five variations of "HV-30", it comes down to needs, features and format, rather than sound. The build quality of the original HV-3 series is hard to beat, with gold connectors, stepped gain switches, thick piano-black faceplates and audiophile-grade components and wiring. In contrast, the construction of the HVP models is a touch more utilitarian, with thinner enclosures, smaller and less solid variable gain knobs, etc. However, they offer a feature set that makes me a tad jealous—my HV-3 line has Gain and Phantom controls, but none of the other fun stuff!

The best part of the HV-30 series is they now offer a solution to every possible configuration need, and the new HV-30P units may be the best yet; they're portable, handy, and you can get one or two channels of HV sound without even needing a power enclosure.

I only have one small niggle with these two units. If you are adjusting the controls quickly, be careful—the edges on the aluminum overhang are slightly sharp. Other than that, it's hard to argue with the newly mobile Millennia! ➔

Prices: HV-35P, \$719.99; HV-32P, \$1079.99

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