

City Slickers

Sadowsky Metro R5-24 five-string and MV4 four-string basses

By **E.E. Bradman**

ROGER SADOWSKY has become synonymous with a quintessential Big Apple bass aesthetic: familiar, Fender-like contours, innovative use of body woods and tops, and smooth electronics with the full range of articulated lows, throaty mids, and sizzling highs. This year, Sadowsky celebrates 25 years as one of the most successful bass names in New York City by unveiling the Metro series, a less-expensive—though by no means cheap—version of his oh-so-desirable flagship NYC line. Sadowsky says the Metros, built in Tokyo, will feature the same craftsmanship and attention to detail of the NYCs but with less of that line's vast array of wood, pickup configurations and electronic options.

FIVE ALIVE

The Metro R5-24 (the model number stands for "rosewood fingerboard five-string with 24 frets") proclaims its modern status with two soapbar pickups, a pickguard-free design, a diamond-shaped control layout and a fingerboard that is three frets longer than the standard 21. At first sight, the R5's rosewood fingerboard/Lake Placid Blue combination was straightforward, even a little dull, but closer examination revealed small surprises, like the flame maple pattern that extends up the back of the neck into the headstock, the perfectly cut nut and the spotlessly tidy preamp cavity.

Sadowsky's alder bodies weigh less than four pounds, and I was pleasantly surprised that the bass wasn't neck-heavy. (Sadowsky says production models will feature Hipshot-licensed Ultralight tuners.) The maple neck was comfortably thin and wide, and the controls were simple: volume, a pickup blend with a center detent, a bass boost that doubles as a push-pull active/passive selector, and a treble control.

How does it sound? Exactly how a bass should—with consistent, ballsy tone across

the fingerboard, from the tight B string to the 24th-fret G. With the treble rolled nearly off, the R5 still maintained Sadowsky's crisp, trademark highs that make you want to pop the G string all night. As on all modern Sadowsky five-strings, the R5's two pickups are close together and far back. If you think moving the pickups away from the neck means less bottom, the monstrous bass boost will tell you otherwise. The back pickup's virtues are subtle, however, so if you want ultra-Jaco tone, look elsewhere.

FIRST-CLASS ASH

The Sadowsky Metro MV4's fine ash body, maple neck and fingerboard and black pickguard will feel instantly familiar, particularly to those who admire the Seventies instruments popularized by Fender's '75 Jazz Basses reissue and the company's Geddy Lee

THE DEETS

LIST PRICES R5-24, \$2,225.00; MV4, \$2,000.00
MANUFACTURER Sadowsky Guitars Ltd., 20 Jay St., #5C, Brooklyn, NY 11201; (718) 422-1123; sadowsky.com

and Marcus Miller signature models. The Jazz-style controls include volume, pickup blend (with a center setting), treble, and a bass boost that's also a push-pull active/passive selector.

More than just a high-end clone, however, Sadowsky's Metro MV adds electric muscle to the classic Fender template. Like the R5, the MV is blessed with strong low and low-mid tones and sizzling highs, though I actually found many great tones with the treble rolled all the way off. The spokewheel truss rod, standard on all Sadowskys, is a thoughtful and efficient way to protect the bass and pickguard from errant truss rod adjustments. The preamp is aggressive when necessary, and the pickups are much quieter than many of their older counterparts. The MV's fret ends were a little rough for my tastes, but the setup was to die for.

IN USE

On both the R5 and the MV, I found the control knobs smooth and hiss-free, but the pickup pan on my model felt counterintuitive—you highlight the back pickup by rolling toward the neck and solo the front pickup by rolling it toward the bridge. (Not a huge deal. In fact, Sadowsky will wire the pan switch exactly the way you like when you order your bass.) Both basses were just a little leaner sounding in passive mode, but I did miss having tone controls—I'd recommend the \$150 Vintage Tone Control retrofit so you can dial in bass and treble while bypassing the battery. Passive or active, every note of either Sadowsky was as authoritative and punchy or as round as I wanted it to be.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With either the R5-24 or the MV4, it's almost effortless to find every sound you'll need, from *faux* upright lows and crisp fingerstyle to modern slap tone, biting pick sounds and everything in-between. Sadowsky's instruments are used onstage and in studios by badass players in nearly every genre, from Ozzy Osbourne and Voivod's Jason Newsted to Steely Dan co-founder Walter Becker to Aerosmith's Tom Hamilton. Here's your chance to find out why, at a price that's a little closer to attainable. ■

