

Sadowsky Metro Series MV4, RV5 & M5-24

By [Jonathan Herrera](#) | January 2005

New York builder Roger Sadowsky may make the most watched bass in show business, as played by Will Lee on the Late Show with David Letterman. It's no wonder, given Sadowsky's long career as a repair and upgrade tech to New York's busiest session bassists. Since 1979, Sadowsky has worked with top artists like Lee and Marcus Miller to fine-tune their vintage Fenders. In 1982, Sadowsky began producing his own line of Fender-inspired basses, offering the upgrades he often added to his clients' instruments in an original bass at a premium price. Sadowsky designed the Metro series to offer a less expensive entry into his line. He teamed with longtime cohort Yoshi Kikuchi, who runs Sadowsky's Japanese operation, to produce the instruments in Japan. The basses are essentially identical to the domestic models, offering the same design, bridge, pickups, and preamp. Unlike Sadowsky's customizable NYC models, the Metro's options are limited to model and color choice.

There are three Sadowsky Metro models; each mirrors a similar model in Sadowsky's U.S. line. The Vintage and Standard Series instruments are identical, with 21-fret necks and Jazz-positioned pickups, except the Standard has no pickguard. The Modern Series utilizes a 24-fret neck and Sadowsky soapbar pickups. All basses feature Sadowsky's boost-only 2-band EQ preamp with active/passive switch. We checked out 4- and 5-string Vintage models and an M5.

State Of Mind

Each of our testers felt and looked great. Due to the extended cutaway and longer neck, the M5 body shape differs slightly from the others, but each bass feels about the same, with good balance and curves in all the right places. The basses aren't too heavy, although the alder-bodied RV5 feels appreciably more massive than the lighter ash-bodied M5. The 3/4" string spacing of all our testers left plenty of room for slapping and digging in. Each bass shares the same shallow-C neck profile, which felt smooth and comfortable throughout testing. Due to the blocky four-bolt neck joint and vintage-style body profile, high-fret access on the Vintage basses was average. The M5's deeper cutaway allowed for good access up to the 24th fret.

Construction and fit-and-finish were excellent on each instrument. Arriving in slick semi-hard cases, the basses were good-to-go, with dialed-in setups and new Sadowsky strings. The lustrous finish of each bass was beautiful, but I was partial to the Lake Placid Blue RV5's effervescent sparkle. The Sadowsky's hardware was solid and well installed, but I wish lockable strap buttons were provided. The basses' fretwork was exemplary, with no high spots, unfilled kerfs, or other causes for concern. Each pot rotated smoothly, and I dug the big knobs with bright-white indicator lines.

Opening the basses' control cavities revealed immaculate wiring and a clean, well-laid-out design. The Sadowskys' cavities are extensively coated in shielding paint to reduce radio-frequency interference. Unlike classic Jazz-style layouts where the electronics are accessed from the top, the Vintage-series Sadowskys have rear-access cavities. In traditional style, however, the Vintage-series pots are mounted to an aluminum faceplate. Kudos to Sadowsky for supplying a high-quality Duracell Pro Cell 9-volt battery instead of a cheaper generic model.

Two Tone

At the heart of Roger Sadowsky's design philosophy is his belief that good amplified tone comes directly from using wood with excellent acoustic qualities. Not surprisingly, the three testers all had a crisp and resonant acoustic snap, with the M5 having the most focus and texture. I tested each bass in our Soundroom with a variety of rigs, including our Demeter/Crest reference amp, a Mesa Big Block 750, a Gallien-Krueger 1001RB, and numerous cabinets from AccuGroove, Aguilar, Ampeg, Bergantino, Eden, and SWR.

One small gripe: To me the more intuitive blend pot rotation is clockwise for the neck pickup, but Sadowsky disagrees. No big deal, but it took some getting used to. The Vintage-series basses both utilize stacked humbuckers, not the noisier single coils of their vintage inspiration. Sadowsky's basses are renowned for a gutsy warmth that retains edge and clarity, and the Metros don't disappoint. Part of this characteristic tone recipe is Sadowsky's beloved boost-only preamp. The circuit was especially well voiced, providing a clean and organic-sounding boost that sounded less like a preamp than a passive bass gone loud. The MV4 and RV5 sound quite similar, with the MV4 being the more forward and zingy of the two. With both pickups blended, bass rolled up halfway, and treble up slightly less, the Vintage-series basses had a thick tone that's rich with fundamental. The dynamic sensitivity was pleasing; digging-in for a pop yields a sizzly snap that you may not expect given the basses' fingerstyle smoothness. Though both Vintage-series basses do it well, the MV4 has a particularly vicious, burpy soloed-bridge-pickup tone. The RV5's B string was taut and focused, with excellent pitch definition in its lowest registers. I played the RV5 on a demo project in my Mac-based home studio. I got smiley on playback, thanks to the Sadowsky's full-bodied, track-filling tone, which sat well with the kick drum.

Compared to the Vintage-series basses, the M5 is a bass-of-a-different-color: For starters, its two closely spaced

soapbars pump out decidedly more aggressive tone than the other instruments. The M5 shares that warmth-plus-zing quality with the Vintage axes, but it's edgier and more focused in the upper midrange. It's a wicked slap bass; boosting the bass and treble with the pickups blended made for a rich and crackling tone that killed on a funk rehearsal. The bass-and-treble EQ offered a solid array of tones, and I was glad that even with both bands dimed the tone was musical and inspiring. Interestingly, since the M5's neck pickup is so far back, it sounds unlike a conventional neck-pickup—its tone retains some of the midrangey bite of the bridge sound. The M5 also has a particularly delicious top-to-bottom clarity. Everything from low-register chords to uptempo high-fret soloing rang clear and true, with excellent articulation and sonic zeal.

If you crave the distinctive tone of a Sadowsky or if you're just looking for an impeccably constructed J-style bass, any of the Metro basses is a great value. The Metros successfully bring the definitive tone and feel of the made-in-NYC instruments to a lower price point. And Roger Sadowsky's confidence in his Japanese operation is obvious—on his Web site, he recommends purchasing a Metro over a domestic bass if you don't need any of the options the U.S. models provide.

TECHSPECS

Scale length: 34"

Weight: MV4, 8 lbs, 15 oz; RV5, 9 lbs, 11 oz; M5, 9 lbs

Other models: Standard series, same physically as Vintage series but no pickguard, \$1,795–\$2,075; R5-24, Modern series 5-string with alder body and rosewood fingerboard, \$2,225

Colors: Natural, '59 Burst, Olympic White, Sonic Blue, black, Lake Placid Blue, Candy Apple Red, Corsica Blue Mica, translucent white, blue, red

Made in: Japan

Semi-hardshell case: Included

Warranty: One year

SADOWSKY

Sadowsky MV4 & RV5

List price: \$1,900 (MV4), \$2,025 (RV5); approx.

Street price: N/A

Pros: Superb construction; great all-purpose tone.

Cons: None.

Sadowsky M5-24

List price: \$2,300; approx.

Street price: N/A

Pros: Superb construction; wicked slap tone; excellent clarity.

Cons: None.

Contact: (718) 422-1123; www.sadowsky.com

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