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La Marzocco GS/3 - Jay Millar's Review

Posted: October 24, 2007, 12:44am

review rating: 9.1

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More About This Product

- The La Marzocco GS/3 has 1 Reviews
- The La Marzocco GS/3 has been rated 8.60 overall by our member reviewers
- This product has been in our review database since October 23, 2007.
- La Marzocco GS/3 reviews have been viewed 1,072 times (updated hourly).

Ratings and Stats

Overall Rating: 8.6

Product Reviewed: GS3	
Manufacturer: La Marzocco Srl	Quality: 8
Average Price: Varies	Usability: 10
Price Paid: \$5,000.00	Cost vs. Value: 8
Where Bought: Espresso Equipment Specialists Australia Pty Ltd.	Aesthetics: 8
Owned for: 6 months	Overall: 9
Writer's Expertise: I live coffee	Would Buy Again: Yes
Similar Items Owned: ECM Giotto	
Bottom Line:	State of the art technology @ home that is not only easy to use, but capable of delivering excellent espresso EVERY time

Positive Product Points

Stable. Stable. Stable. Did I mention stable? Not only with option to bypass reservoir and plumb directly to your water supply, but also to plumb the drip tray to your drain (rare on consumer-friendly machines). In summary, pro-technology in a home light-commercial model.

Negative Product Points

A fair bit of condensation in the steam

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wand which needs a good purge before use, and then the joint connecting the steam wand to the body of the machine failed...

Detailed Commentary

La Marzocco can point to a long and proud history stretching back to the 1920's. Located on foothills on the outskirts of Florence in Italy, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a guided tour of the factory just days after taking delivery of my GS3 in Australia (thanks Barbara – really appreciated the site tour!)

The LM factory is not huge, in fact they're probably pushed for space, but this hasn't prevented them from developing and maintaining a world-renowned reputation for the quality of their espresso machines. You have the feeling that the team is proud of their "hand made artesian" approach – and rightly so.

The GS3 was a long time in coming, and it's thanks to some visionary people that this landmark espresso machine became a reality. It is easy to say, "Why isn't there a machine that does such and such?" but quite another to develop and deliver on it. LM is to be congratulated for what they have achieved in bringing the GS3 to market.

I consider myself experienced around espresso, but I'm not a "taste master" or professional Barista, so the tone of this review is going to come from my "Joe Consumer" observations as opposed to microscopically detailed analysis of the variables behind the scenes.

A final point by way of introduction, we replaced our ECM Giotto with the La Marzocco GS3, so that forms the basis of some of my comparisons. It is partnered with a Mazer Mini E grinder – and various home roasts.

First Observations

Removing the side panels and looking inside reveals a neat and clever build. It's really quite something that as the originators of dual boiler espresso machines, LM has managed to deliver a dual boiler design within such a small space.

And small it is. The GS3 sits slightly lower



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than our old Giotto, however it is also a little wider and seems about as deep. But the bottom line is that it's easy to find counter space for the GS3 – it's an ideal size for home, and office, or if you really wanted as a "movable" machine (LM dub the GS3 as, "The lite professional" and this is apt – there's enough horsepower here to do justice in a low volume professional environment – and I say "low volume" only because it's a one group model. I fully expect its build is heavy duty enough to mean the GS3 is comparable to its larger siblings in it's ability to stand up to the workload in say a restaurant or catering environment). I can also see this machine as being suitable to transport to functions, meetings, tastings and so on. No you can't tuck it under your arm and take it with you, as like all pro machines, the GS3 is reasonably heavy. However, it's going to be a lot easier to transport than any other product in the LM range. Transporting the machine is therefore a viable and potentially very useful factor.

In case you want to check your counter space – the GS3 is 35.5cm high, 40cm wide and 53cm deep. While we're at tech-specs, it's available 110 v 15 Amps or 220 V 10Amps, the steam boiler capacity is 3.5 litres and the coffee boiler is 1.5 litres.

Unlike the Giotto, the primary surface area is Stainless Steel. Schoemer was correct when he described the Giotto as, "Oozing Chrome" – and with the arrival of our new GS3 the WAF was somewhat muted as the GS3's stainless finish just doesn't have the oh-wow visuals of a Chrome E61 Group (but understandable, and hardly fatal). As it transpired, the WAF went up as the outputs of the GS3 revealed themselves.

The GS3 has cool-touch wands for steam and hot water, and both are on balled sockets to allow reasonable movement. In fact left-right movement is great but the range for up and down is more restricted. A range of soft-touch buttons are on the upper right for the usual operational needs – and these are "multi-function" in that they do dual duty for various menu options. A joystick on the lower left operates the steam valve when pushed in any direction.

The warming tray is bigger than that on the Giotto thanks to the extra width of this machine. The large water reservoir can be removed for direct plumbing (I have done this) and the drip tray can be bunged for local collection, or plumbed directly to the drain – something of a rarity in light

commercial/home machines. If planning to use as a transportable you'd skip the plumbing options - but as that's not the case for me, I've taken advantage of these features.

As noted, the GS3 is available in 110 and 220 volt models (and as I understand it, the 110 volt model was designed for 110 from the get go, as opposed to being a 220 that was then "converted" - so this should prove better for the US market, although here in Australia I obviously have the 220 model)

There is a rocker switch for power on the lower rear left. This can be left on, and the soft-buttons on the fascia then used to power up and power down the machine (requiring a two-button press to power down)

Two dials are on the upper left fascia - one each for the steam and hot water boilers.

Two high-quality portafilters and a range of baskets are supplied. The exposed group is front-and-centre, sadly to my eye the black plastic cap is well, boring. I think something stainless (or chrome?) and mildly artistic would have been cooler - but that aside, this cap unscrews for bleeding purposes on set-up. By the way, the Group is saturated by water from the coffee boiler - adding to the overall stability. Lastly, a paddle wheel group is another option.

In use

From switch on, the illuminated LCD readout shows the temperature climb steadily and reasonably quickly at that. It's probably ready within 20 minutes or so, but I leave it for 45 minutes to an hour to stabilize - a habit I got into with the Giotto.

Operation is simple enough (very simple in fact. The GS3 really benefits from years of LM expertise in that so much thinking seems to have gone in to getting it "just right" on the inside). So, it's a case of grind, dose, tamp and extract largely as normal, but let's look into it some more...

The six soft-touch buttons allow for a decent degree of customisation - a range of options can be programmed and I know I have not learnt all it can offer yet (and yes the manual seemed thin - the third Italian espresso company I have noted for this

kind of brevity in instruction, but maybe in this case that's the point – this is an easy machine to use).

One of the buttons allows for a continuous pour, but there is no pre-infusion option if you do this – although I programmed one of the buttons for a short pulse and can then hit continuous. That said, I like the volume based pour just fine.

Amongst the customisation features you can have the GS3 come on at a pre-determined time, although I would have preferred this to include a "by day of week" option as I have a different start time on the weekend :)

The PID controller nails temperature management, it simply takes over and gets out of the way. No more temp surfing from my previous HX days – this is quite a revelation as the consistency cup to cup is, well, consistent.

When extracting, the GS3's rotary pump is a little quieter than our old Giotto ("Ol 'Thumper" thanks to its noisy pulse pump). Some espresso connoisseurs have noted that rotary pumps can lead to a better taste over a vibration pump. I have not been able to do an A-B comparison on this, but will take it as possible.

The steam joystick is a pleasant surprise. It is very easy to use and can take you to full speed steam immediately. This control is different from anything else I've seen or used, and already I can see it becoming one of my favourite features of the GS3, in fact the old "unwind" valve for steam suddenly seems cumbersome compared to the GS3's joystick approach.

Speaking of steam, the milk we're getting from GS3 is very sweet and quickly prepared. With the right technique it's micro-bubble heaven. Yes it took some learning, but it wasn't too hard. At last I have a machine that treats milk steaming seriously. Case closed! In fact my only gripe is that the steam wand likes to hold some condensation and needs a decent blast before it's put into the milk pitcher. I noted that during the prototype phase there was some discussion over the steam wand tip, but to date I have no problems so assume those issues have been resolved.

The hot water spout (referred to as Tea, but I guess Americano drinkers won't mind) delivers a decent volume of hot water in a

fairly fast stream – something the Giotto was kind of slow at.

Having said that the GS3 is easy to use, don't assume there's nothing to tweak as this machine allows you to customise many settings including temperature of espresso water, temperature of tea water, pump pressure, volume of various shots, start time, the expansion valve and more.

The drip tray is functional enough, but feels a little on the small side (dimension wise). Annoyingly some small vibrations travel through it, these being sufficient to make stainless steel cups "walk" during extraction. I've found I can resolve this with a little padding between the drip tray grill and the body of the drip tray – but really, this should not happen. In fact I think of the drip tray as a weak point, but if there had to be a weak point I'd rather have it here than on the insides.

I understand the pro-quality components (which are reflected in the price) mean there's and absence of brass and that can only help flavour wise (both boilers and the group components are stainless steel), as water and brass to lead to some taste taints in my opinion.

The bad news..

A couple of months in and the ball socket for the steam wand came away from the chassis. It still dispenses steam just fine, but as yet has not been repaired. LM parts have arrived in Sydney, but local support and taking a look at the solution as my experience is not an isolated case. I also read on line complaints about the finish on holes drilled on the drip tray frame - I tend to agree about this. The drip tray was also criticised in pre-production reviews, and I think it still needs work. It rattles and vibrates no end during an extraction with the result that my stainless steel cups with their smooth surfaces start "walking" and can move away from the pour if you don't watch carefully (easy to monitor as I'm right there steaming the milk, but really this is a small thing that should have been sorted)

And the taste test?

Two observations – (1) the machine is very easy to use and it let's the barista do their thing without interference, (2) like all PID machines, the barista can now focus on their technique and less on manual

temperature management. The result is the ability to repeat - to experiment and learn. So what did I learn?

I learnt that some of my home roasts are not as good as I thought they were. I also learnt that some were even better than I imagined. Both are great outcomes, and both were better revealed on the GS3 than my prior espresso machines.

In fact I've gone back to some Single Origin roasts as a journey of experimentation as I play with the temperature and seek to isolate more nuances in my espressos. I have been intrigued to taste new dimensions, indeed new flavours since getting the GS3, and I'm excited by what lies ahead.

The appearance of the rich deep crema never fails to tease the tastebuds! Frankly the GS3 espresso machine is all I wanted it to be, and then some. It has some quirks, but they're minor. Cup after cup, the espresso and cappuccino's have impressed - and when there's been a let down, I simply know it wasn't the GS3 at fault. It was my roast, grind or technique that needed attention (or of course, the option to raise or lower the temperature to see how that revealed in the taste)

Can you make a better espresso on a cheaper machine? Of course it's possible, but where the value comes into play for me is the ease and consistency of the process and the high quality of the results. This promises to open a whole new level of learning and appreciation, and for this reason alone I rate the GS3 incredibly highly - despite the steam wand issue above - but I will post a follow up comment on just how well this is solved by LM and the local agent.

Buying Experience

Good. Greg at Espresso Equipment Specialists was very helpful.

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review rating: 9.1

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