Rode S1

Henry Brister recently hit the road on yet another Australian tour and took along a little mate... the Rode S1.

On a cold, windy Ballarat night the phone on my hip started ringing. "Where are you?" came the voice of our venerated editor.

"Ballarat, where are you?" I replied.

"Ballarat!" came the answer. "Are you interested in reviewing a mic?"

"I'm doing soundcheck right now, what is it?"

"The new Rode S1 handheld condenser… are you interested?"

Right at this point I was looking at a tired '58 sadly sitting on the drummer's mic stand, and looking forward to equalising the #$%@ out of it one more time to get the response I needed for his sweet backups.

"I can't leave soundcheck, can you bring it down to the venue?!" I shouted.

"I'll be right there!", he affirmed.

So, half an hour later, with a new Rode S1 safely in my hot little hand I immediately began checking out this cool new mic in the only way I know how… by putting it straight to work.

Manufactured in Australia, the Rode S1 is one of the toughest looking mics on the market and although it sustained some scratches on a recent Australian tour (anyone who knows me will understand this to be nothing short of miraculous!) the mic is so sturdy I reckon you could virtually hammer in nails with it. This mic feels almost indestructible.

Built for the Road

The S1's weight is also reassuring, inspiring confidence and marking it as a 'serious piece of kit'. From the satin nickel finish of the body casing to the virtually military-grade basket, the build tolerance of the S1 is all class. The basket itself is very impressive. Made up of five separate mesh filter screens, this thing is rugged – the outer grille is apparently bead blasted as well as nickel plated, the innermost being nylon, and the ones between stainless steel. If you've ever had your own vocal mic (or a lot of them), you know how 'gunk' can build up on the foam insert and ruin the mic's response – often the foam itself disintegrates, requiring a whole new screen. No longer! This basket could probably be put in the dishwasher! (Not recommended by the manufacturer).

But seriously, this is a mighty piece of engineering; I could do with these baskets for a lot of *other* mics I tour with. The reduction of vocal plosives is excellent, yet the mic's top end response seems almost the same, whether it's off or on. Amazing.

The Performance

The top-end response of the S1 capsule has the presence lift associated with many live vocal condensers – around 11kHz – and although this can add 'sparkle', on several occasions it required notching of 10kHz and/or 12.5kHz in the foldback – up to 8dB in some situations – to stop high-end feedback. This was not often necessary for the front of house, however, and out front the S1 really seemed to allow the voice to project without the usual cymbal clatter that normally gets in a drummer's vocal microphone on stage – I was even able to turn the S1 off in many venues without affecting the FOH sound, which in a good-sized club, can be quite rare when using the usual mic 'suspects'.

A couple of folk around the traps have complained of having problems with the top end and low mids when using quite a few S1s simultaneously on stage, and there were indeed a few issues in these areas for a PA not tuned with the S1 in mind – although the Rode can't really be expected to take the blame for this. If the S1 becomes your dominant vocal mic on stage, just make sure you tune the PA with it, otherwise the response curve may cause problems during the gig.

On other instruments, the S1 produced some surprising results – on a kick drum it gave a good, rocky sound straight up (coping nonchalantly with the extreme SPL – 151dB the quoted maximum input tolerance), snares were snappy and full, and guitar cabinets came alive without becoming brittle.

In the studio

I also took the S1 into a recording studio where I used it to track guide vocals, and in that situation the response of the Rode S1 gave the vocalist a bright, full tone while simultaneously allowing the singer to jump around without fear of handling noise issues – of which there are none. (Handling noise – the audible thumps and bumps caused by the inadequate isolation of the capsule from the microphone's outer body – is a common problem in the world of sensitive handheld condensers, and is often the reason why engineers and some singers opt instead for dynamic microphones on stage). Although these vocals were theoretically only 'guides' they sounded good enough to keep – we all know guide vocals are often the best takes at the end of

the day… a familiar handheld mic can often be just the tonic.

Tonally, the S1 has helped me achieve the vocal balance I've been looking for live – particularly in smaller venues. The only 'issue' I had with it was simply the fact that it's a condenser – hardly an 'issue' though I suppose… Unfortunately, microphone leads and in-house PA systems are not always so dependable as the S1 – I had one incidence of 'fallout' courtesy of a recalcitrant mic lead in the middle of a show (never happens in soundcheck, does it?), causing the horrible pops and crackles associated with phantom power loss – and in one place the microphone worked without phantom applied to the channel. Now *that's* a worry!

All in all, there is no doubt that the folks at Rode have come up with a great mic in the S1 – a sturdy addition to the 'toolbox of the road', and a worthy team member of any studio mic collection as well.

Distributed by

- *Rode Microphones*

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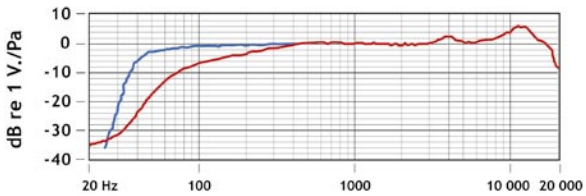

Right of Reply
Peter Freedman (President, Rode Microphones)

I read that Henry had a problem with tuning the foldback and want to make comment on it if I may.

The S1 has a very smooth response extending from its low-end cut-off, right up to around 8kHz. That's a better than ±2dB response and more akin to the tight tolerances and specifications that studio mics normally aspire to. We've designed in a 'presence peak' of less that 6dB centred around 12kHz measured on axis. Being a hypercardioid mic we have achieved around 20-25dB rejection when set up correctly with the foldback speakers positioned so that they're aimed in the null of the polar response – which is not directly at the back of the mic (as per conventional cardioid mics such as SM58s), but rather between either side of the rear lobe. If notching of up to 8dB was required, and the monitors were positioned correctly, which was probably difficult for Henry to achieve with a drum-fill, then I would add that there might have been major peaks in the monitors that were the culprit and not the mic.

Peter Freedman