

TEST

SE ELECTRONICS GEMINI MICROPHONE

SE ELECTRONICS

Gemini Microphone

Are two valves are better than one? SE seems to think so. **Huw Price** puts the Gemini to the test...



GEMINI

Manufacturer

SE Electronics

Price **£799**

Contact

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With so many excellent new mics now bearing the SE name, the launch of the all-new Gemini was bound to cause something of a stir. The condenser mic arrives in an aluminium flight case that opens to reveal a hand-made solid oak box, an implausibly large suspension mount and a power supply. Removing the Gemini from its

kind of thing was found in the design of vintage valve mics and offers a much more durable connection than multi-pin cannons.

It's also good to see a generous 4.2-metre cable included, giving you sufficient length to get the Gemini up high enough for drum overheads while leaving the power supply safely on the floor. The fixed cardioid capsule is clearly visible through the grille and it sits high above the body to minimise disruptive reflections.

The build quality and the sound of the Gemini easily justifies its asking price.

wooden box is enough to produce genuine gasps of astonishment. This is a behemoth of a microphone. Styling is classic SE Electronics, but the girth and weight of the body are unusual – like a Neumann U47 on a diet of burgers and chips.

Double trouble

But all that extra room is needed: the Gemini contains two valves rather than the usual one. Indeed, 35 holes are drilled into the rear of the body so you can clearly see the orange glow of the valve heaters. There is, possibly, a degree of showmanship going on here, but judging by the rapid build up of heat, the Gemini does need the extra ventilation. That said, some heat is welcome because it keeps the capsule dry and free of noise-inducing condensation.

The chassis is finished in a matt grey coating with gold legends and a smart SE badge. The base unscrews to reveal a printed circuit board with industrial-grade components and the two SE-branded valves. The dual triode valves are twins – as the Gemini moniker suggests – but they are not identical. A 12AX7 (ECC83) handles input duties while a 12AU7 (ECC82) takes care of the output.

A big plus is the multi-pin connector used to join the mic to the power supply. It is a precision unit that screws onto the shaft, making a secure connection. This

Silence is golden

Connecting up is intuitive enough and switch-on prompts a red LED at the front of the power supply to blink, indicating warm-up status. This stabilises after a short while and operational status is announced by a sharp audible 'spike' – so make sure your channel is muted or your monitors are turned down.

Low-noise, solid-state mics are commonplace, but you can still expect more 'background' from a valve design – so the low noise floor of the Gemini is a pleasant surprise. Vocal tests revealed a rich, silky quality with a discernable sense of valve enhancement. The off-axis response is impressive, with a consistent frequency balance and good rear rejection.

The proximity effect is present to a degree, but it's never enough to become a problem even at extreme close-up positions. This suggests a preset bass roll off. Frequency response is un-hyped through the lows and mids, but it does rise above 1kHz to a 3.5dB peak around 10kHz, so the Gemini sounds bright and present but never harsh.

On vocals and acoustic guitar the mic has an up-front and intimate sound with impressive detail while the presence lift helps to make an old set of strings sound new. There is a slight thickening in the low mids, but this will flatter most sources.

Twin set and match

This is not a cheap mic and there are other valve condensers around this price that offer multiple pickup



patterns and extra features, but the Gemini is a far higher-quality tool. Of course, every mic offers something different and this one might not be right for you – but you owe it to your music to try it. www.se-sonic.com

METHOD SPOT

Valve design

Though the distributors weren't able to confirm it, it appears that the first half of the ECC83 triode provides the gain while the second half works in 'cathode follower' mode to lower impedance. The ECC82 is used as a phase splitter to provide the balanced output, making transformer and solid-state output circuitry unnecessary.

SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Valve condenser microphone
- Fixed cardioid response
- Twin-valve preamp
- Transformerless output
- Flightcase and wooden mic box
- 4.2 metre cable

WHY BUY

- Rich, valve sound
- Quality accessories
- Excellent build quality

WALK ON BY

- Fixed cardioid response
- No bass roll off
- No input attenuation pad

VERDICT

Providing you are content with its fixed cardioid response, the build quality and the sound of the Gemini easily justifies its asking price.

