

JERRY IBBOTSON reigns in the power of 660 horses to put the SE Electronics' 4400a mic through its paces.

In recent years the UK-based firm SE Electronics has carved quite a name for itself in the pro audio field. Its products include microphones, Ghost acoustic treatments, and the Reflexion Filter. It's quite a feat; building a reputation for designing and manufacturing excellent products in a relatively short space of time but that's exactly what SE Electronics has managed to do. I was in another firm's studio recently and spotted two SE mics at work, while we use a 3300 in our voice booth, as well as Ghost acoustic panels.

So I was quite excited to get a call from the company, asking if I wanted to try out a pair of its new 4400 mics. These are seen as multi-purpose microphones but are probably most likely to be used for music recording. I say that in a rather clumsy 'capturing-of-music-for-enjoyment-in-the-home' way, because our chief use for any mic like this is in the recording of vehicle engine audio for video games. Yes, I know it's an odd way to make a living but someone's got to do it...

We currently use a range of different mics for this purpose, depending on the job in hand, including a pair of AKG 414s.



SE ELECTRONICS 4400a

Condenser Microphone

The mics will hit the market at £399 for a single, or £849 for a hand matched pair. They're equipped with a unique design of external shock mount and come in a padded metal flight case. The pair also travel with a stereo mounting bracket. They're finished in matt black and the surface looks like it will stand up well to wear and tear, either out in the field or being rigged and de-rigged in the studio or session room by sweaty hands. I've got one on my desk as I write this (a mic, not a sweaty hand) and I keep picking it up just to turn it over in my fingers. It's remarkably petite and that slightly rubberised finish actually makes it a pleasure to handle.

On the front are four dip switches. These control the -10 and -20 db pads, two types of bass roll off, and response settings for omni, figure-of-eight, cardioid, and hyper cardioid. A mesh wafer-shaped grill covers the capsule.

The shockmount is something SE is particularly pleased about. It lets you fix the mic in any position, although I did end up playing with it, Rubik's Cube style, for a few minutes before I could get it completely sussed. The main point is that the bracket which grasps the stem of the mic can be flipped in or out of the main cat's cradle. This lets you shift the mic towards or away from the subject of the recording. You can also rotate and spin the microphone in any direction.

In Use

The first test of the 4400 was literally just that, a quick vocal test in the studio. The voice sounded crisp and clean, if a little sharper than the 3300 that it was replacing. But the main test for us was to take the SEs out on a location recording session.

The opportunity arose in the form of a test recording at a new rolling road facility I'd found close to the Media Mill studio in York. We use rolling roads to record vehicle engine audio for games (imagine doing Foley with a V8 engine and you're in the right ballpark). We needed to

hear how good it was for our purposes, and the best way to find this out was to capture it in use.

For recording, we use an Edirol R4 Pro hooked up to mics like AKG 414s standing inside Reflexion Filters to deal with the acoustics. For the purposes of this test, we simply switched microphones and left everything else the same. We set the mics to cardioid, switched in a -10db pad and the lower of the two bass roll offs. One mic was positioned near to the exhaust of a car (a crazy Toyota Supra with 660 horsepower!), while the other was raised up to the level of the engine bay. The car was fired up and worked its way through the revs, before being held steady. The recorder was situated outside of the main test bay, though not sound isolated, and initial monitoring through headphones suggested that nothing was drastically wrong. The SPL levels being fired out by the car (particularly the exhaust) were extreme, so the first hurdle to cross was the ability to handle them without distortion. The 4400s coped well.

Back in the studio, the files were checked and replayed. As it turned out, the noise of the car's immense

tyres rubbing on the rollers was deafening, but just as important was hearing what kind of recording we'd got with the different microphones. The answer: excellent. The clarity of the audio from either end of the car carried the sounds of the thrashing motor and booming exhaust. There was some discussion about whether the recording was a tiny bit bass light, but if that was the case, then it was nothing serious.

SE mics are always well priced, but does that make them budget affairs? Well, if you are in the lucky position of having a limitless budget for microphones of this type, then you'll be pleased to know that the 4400s are well designed and well built units that perform excellently, and come with that very flexible shock mount. If you happen to have a limit on your spending, you'll also be pleased to note that they won't break the bank.

INFORMATION

④ 4400a GB£399.00 (inc.VAT),
Matched pair GB£849.00 (inc.VAT)

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THE REVIEWER

JERRY IBBOTSON runs Media Mill, a York-based audio production company started in 2000 that specialises in sound for video games. Prior to this, Jerry was a BBC journalist for ten years, ending his spell with the Beeb as a reporter and newsreader at Radio One Newsbeat.