

AKG Perception microphones

Not new to the game of designing and manufacturing mics for the lower cost market, AKG has established a new line for its lower end studio condensers. **JON THORNTON** agrees that a lot of it is a matter of perception.



A LONG TIME before being able to buy a large diaphragm capacitor microphone for under £100 became commonplace, AKG had understood the need to use its expertise in microphone design and construction to provide products that were accessible to those on limited budgets. Some of these early forays into the budget world are still around today, and highly rated — the C1000S springs to mind, for example.

The Perception range is the company's latest excursion into this territory, and comprises three models — the 100, 200 and 400 (UK£102, £136 and £195 + VAT respectively). The fixed pattern 100 and 200 have been available for some time, but the 400 is a recent addition to the range, featuring switchable polar patterns.

Externally, the three microphones look very similar, and feature the same external form factor, with a chunky, solid-looking head grille, and a smoothly tapering body finished in satin nickel in varying shades of light blue and silver depending on the model. It all looks extremely well screwed together, and capable of withstanding the rigours of studio and live work, but the body shape does mean that you're stuck with the supplied clips or shockmounts (a solid clip is supplied with the 100, and a shockmount with the 200 and 400), which screw into the base of the microphone.

Both the 100 and 200 feature a fixed cardioid pattern, and employ the same 1-inch externally polarised diaphragm assembly. The difference between

the two is in the provision of a 10dB pad and high-pass filter on the 200 (300Hz, 12dB/octave). As you might expect, sonically the two microphones are quite similar, and sound reasonably neutral with just a slight tendency towards brittleness on some voices in the high-mids. Although billed as cardioid condensers, in practice their response seemed to verge on hypercardioid, with quite significant HF attenuation as the mic is turned slightly off-axis to source. This has the advantage of offering a way in which to tame that slightly brittle tendency, but does mean that placement is quite critical.

Neither of the microphones seemed to have a noticeably prominent low frequency extension, and when compared with a new 414 XLS this proved to be the case — they don't get quite the same authority to those bottom octaves. And coupled with the fact that proximity effect is noticeable, but not overly so, I queried the choice of HPF on the 200 model, with 300Hz seeming to be quite a high roll-off point. Actually, it works well when switched in, particularly when close miking an acoustic guitar, sounding more like an omnidirectional microphone in this application. This is helped by the fact that the off axis response is reasonably smooth and progressive, with little in the way of unpleasant honkiness — although the rear of the mic does have quite a noticeable HF lift. Transient response is good with both microphones, although again they suffer in comparison to the 414, which extracts noticeably more detail from the likes of percussion and cymbals.

The 400 is the latest addition to the range, and features a dual diaphragm that allows the selection of cardioid, omnidirectional or fig-8 polar patterns, in addition to the HPF and pad found on the 200. A straight comparison between the 400 set to cardioid pattern and the 200 reveals slightly more edginess to the sound using the 400 — not unpleasant, but it does bring out the rasp and sibilance in voices a little more, and adds a jangliness to acoustic guitar that sounds slightly aggressive, which is great in some applications but not so good in others. Switching to the omni pattern seems to negate this characteristic when used close on a source, but at any distance from source the omni pattern seems to suffer in terms of transient response and sounds less than convincing in terms of tonal balance. Despite this, though, the 400 is a quiet unit with respectable SPL handling making it suitable for a wide range of applications.

In all, the Perception range seems to be flexible, cheap and refreshingly unpretentious. There's an honesty about the microphones' origin that is unusual, with 'Made in China' stamped prominently on the rear of the casing. AKG's own literature suggests that the target market is project studios and live sound applications, and this would seem to be spot on in terms of what I heard. Yes, they struggle when compared to a 414, but against similar budget models they more than hold their own, and in many ways sound a little more natural.

For me, the pick of the bunch would be the 200, which in terms of price and performance would serve nicely in the studio as an alternative to something like the C535. The 400 would suit somebody with a limited budget looking for a multipattern large diaphragm capacitor, but spending a little more would probably open up more and better possibilities, both within the AKG line-up and from elsewhere. ■

PROS Well built and well priced; compare very well sonically with similarly priced alternatives.

CONS Form factor means dedicated mic clips are your only option; omni pattern on 400 is a little disappointing.

EXTRAS AKG's new 'third-generation' WMS 40 Pro range includes three families of all-new, application-focused systems. WMS 40 Pro Flexx diversity systems have three user-selectable frequencies for each channel; WMS 40 Pro Single systems have fixed frequencies; and WMS 40 Pro Dual systems have two transmitters and two independent channels in a single half-rack receiver.



The system achieves more than 30 hours' of use from a single AA battery and is compatible with previous WMS 40 systems.

Contact

AKG, AUSTRIA:
Website: www.akg.com
UK, Harman Pro UK: +44 1707 668181