

Røde NT2-A

It's been around long enough to bestow self-appointed 'classic' status on its earliest models, but Røde is looking at building on existing strengths rather than just revisiting them.

JON THORNTON contrasts and compares.

GUESS I STILL think of Røde as one of the new kids on the block in terms of microphone design and manufacture, but it's been a long time since the first of its products emerged. As if to underline this fact, Røde sees the NT2-A as a modern reworking of the original NT2, while at the same time almost ascribing 'classic' status to the NT2.

While we can debate that particular point, the NT2-A is a very different looking beast to the old NT2. The original succeeded in looking very simple and understated (dare I say classic?) in appearance, with more than a passing nod to a certain German manufacturer in terms of aesthetics. The NT2-A is an altogether chunkier look, sharing some common design values with some of Røde's more recent offerings. That's not all it shares either, as the heart of the microphone is the same dual 25mm diaphragm used to such good effect in the Røde K2 valve microphone.

A conventional side addressed design, the 'front' of the NT2-A is where all the action is, courtesy of three stubby three-position toggle switches. The first of these selects polar pattern from a choice of cardioid, omni or fig-8. The next selects a high pass filter at 40Hz, 80Hz or off, and the final switch gives the option of a -5dB or -10dB pad. The switches are all very positive in action, and although putting them so obviously on display might not make for the prettiest mic in the world, they sure are easy to see and set.

General build quality seems very good — it's a fairly weighty microphone largely due to the thickness of the case work. Internally, the electronics are a solid-state J-FET design, with all the switches and components mounted on a tidy looking PCB. It's clear that much work has gone into this element of the design, as the NT2-A is a very quiet mic indeed, which when coupled with an output that is a little hotter than most means that noise never really becomes an issue.

The NT2-A ships with a protective pouch and a fixed standmount. This mount secures to the base of the microphone and is held in place by a locking ring that is unscrewed from the microphone and then replaced once the stand mount has been put in place. It works well, and seems capable of holding the microphone securely in any position you want, but I can't help thinking that if you lost the locking ring you'd be screwed.

The first test for the mic was a straightforward comparison against two ubiquitous studio microphones, a U87 and a C414, on male and female vocals. The first impression is that Røde hasn't produced a 'me too' microphone — its tone is very distinctive. On male vocals it has a slight graveliness

to the low mids that isn't unpleasant, giving a slight 'raunch' to the sound rather than the more mellow results of the U87. There is also a hint of sharpness on the high frequencies that is quite revealing of overly sibilant vocals and breath sounds — again it sounds a little brighter than the U87 but not quite as open as the 414 in these ranges. Having said that, it never sounds particularly 'hyped' like some other budget large diaphragm contenders.

Female vocals seemed to suit it a little less well — there was a tendency for it to sound a little lumpy and boxy in the low mid range here, and this is emphasised by some quite significant proximity effect when used close on the cardioid pattern. Careful positioning, though, gave some very nice sounds when used on a female vocalist delivering a rootsey soul number.

Moving to a nylon strung acoustic guitar again showed just how much Røde has striven to make a microphone that is a true studio workhorse. Used relatively close on a cardioid setting gives a full, slightly overblown sound, yet with plenty of mid range detail — certainly a sound that would sit very comfortably in a mix. Backing off a bit gives more air and results in a sound that is a little less forced, yet still sounds a little more flattering than the unforgiving, but beautifully detailed sound of the 414.

In summary, the NT2-A is likely to find many homes — it would be as welcome in a well stocked mic cupboard as it would be as the only large diaphragm mic in a small project studio. Its price (UK£229 + VAT) makes it a real bargain, which is all the more satisfying as you get the sense that the money is being spent where it matters and not where it doesn't. The no frills looks may not appeal to everybody, but where it counts it delivers handsomely. ■



Contact

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PROS

Distinctive but flexible sonic character; great value; quiet.

CONS

Not the prettiest mic in the world; make sure you don't lose that locking ring.

EXTRAS

The Røde VideoMic for camcorder users attaches via a standard hot-shoe fitting and is a shotgun design featuring an integral windshield and full suspension mount that isolates the mic from mechanical noise generated by the camcorder. It has a switchable 80Hz filter and is constructed from ABS. Power, for in excess of 100 hours use, is provided by a 9V PP3 battery. Output is at line level via a 3.5mm mini jack.

