

TEST

SE ELECTRONICS SE-1A, SE-2A, SE-3

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For natural-sounding recordings, small-capsule condensers are hard to beat. **Huw Price** checks out three new models from SE...

SE-1A, SE-2A, SE-3

Manufacturer
SE Electronics

Price **SE-1A: £70; SE-2A: £150; SE-3: £122**

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So here we have three small-diaphragm, solid-state transformerless end-fire (sound is picked up from the mic's end) microphones with satin metallic silver finishes. The no-frills entry-level SE-1A is an updated version of the SE-1, with a fixed cardioid capsule. It's supplied in a cardboard box with protective foam cutouts and a mic clip. It looks very much like a beefier version of Neumann's KM84, but there is a raised grey band behind the capsule housing and a bright red SE logo along with the engraved model number and company name.

If the cap fits

The SE-2A offers extra versatility in the form of three removable capsules. These provide cardioid, hyper-cardioid and omnidirectional pickup patterns. This modular system isn't a new idea – in fact Schoeps has been doing it for decades (and in the same price range) and Oktava's long-running MC-012 has the same three capsule options. But the SE-2A's trump card is its superb shock mount.

Each capsule is clearly marked with a diagram of its pickup pattern, but when the SE-2A is wearing its cardioid hat it is indistinguishable from the SE-1A. The giveaway is the size of the rear vents. They are largest on the hyper-cardioid, smaller for cardioid, and totally absent for omnidirectional.

The cardioid SE-3 has the same wooden box and shock mount as the SE-2A, but it is much chunkier, with a double row of circular capsule vents which might fool you into thinking that it's a side-fire microphone, but it too is an end-fire design. It is fitted with a slightly larger capsule and it has the added refinements of switchable 10dB attenuation and bass rolloff. It also wears an SE grey collar, but the wider capsule is of a different design and, according to the manufacturers, the SE-3 features higher-spec electronic components and upgraded circuitry.

3, 2, 1... blast off

Priority one for any studio has to be a decent vocal mic, but it doesn't hurt to also have a specialist instrument mic offering more detail and a little less hype – especially for high-frequency sources like drum overheads and acoustic guitars. The SE-1A gives you high frequencies aplenty, but although it performs spectacularly for its price, it does sound a little spiky in the top end.

The SE-2A with its cardioid capsule is supposed to be more or less identical, but in practice our example was rather smoother. In hyper-cardioid mode it became a more focused in the low-mids but sounded a little 'pinched'. However, that's an acceptable trade off when only a hyper-cardioid microphone will do. The SE-2A was most impressive in omni mode, making an Oktava MC-012 omni sound rather lifeless and subdued in comparison.

As well as opening up the midrange, the sound acquires extra low-end depth and the highs take on a halo-like sparkle. Practical omni microphones always become more directional at high frequencies, so sources at the front will sound brighter. You can use this to your advantage, attenuating high frequencies by playing into the side or rear of the mic.

Although in cardioid mode the SE-2A also sounds a little edgy, we're glad to report that the SE-3 is a much sweeter-sounding performer. The pad and the bass rolloff are massively useful and, all things considered, the SE-3 is a big step up from its stablemates in both sound and function.

All for one?

This trio of microphones looks great. Both the SE-1A and the SE-2A (in cardioid) lack a little substance, but in this price range they are still creditable performers. The SE-3, on the other hand, is a very pleasing microphone that balances warmth with top-end detail and it's cheaper than the SE-2A. If it had an omni setting, it would be unbeatable. **MTM**



SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Small capsules
- Transformerless output
- 30Hz-20kHz/300Ω (SE-1A, 2A)
- 20Hz-20kHz/ 200Ω (SE-3)
- Fixed cardioid (SE-1A, SE-3)
- Interchangeable capsules (SE-2A)
- 48V phantom power
- 10dB pad and bass rolloff (SE-3)

WHY BUY

- High build quality
- Fantastic shock mount (SE-2A, SE-3)
- Great styling
- Clean, low noise sound
- Competitive prices

WALK ON BY

- Slightly hard sound (SE-1A)
- Fixed cardioid response (SE-3)

VERDICT

At these prices, it's hard to find fault with any of these microphones, but the SE-2A stands out for its multi-pattern capsules and the SE-3 for its refined sound.

SE-1A

★★★★★★★★★★

SE-2A

★★★★★★★★★★

SE-3

★★★★★★★★★★

METHOD SPOT Flexible response

Where spillage and separation are important considerations, a hyper-cardioid capsule can save your bacon, but it's nice to also have the choice of cardioid and (especially) omni. The SE-2A has a special capsule for every recording situation, making it a versatile and sonically flexible recording tool.