

WHAT IS IT?

Ribbon microphone with valve stage

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Well engineered
- 2 Classy sound
- 3 Innovative design

FutureMusic

Platinum Award

sE Electronics RT1-Ribbon Tube microphone | £935

Think ribbon mics are unusual? Then how's about a ribbon valve mic? **Jon Musgrave** takes the tube

SPECS

Type: Velocity Mic with valve output stage
Tube: 12AX7 / ECC83
Element: 1.8 micron aluminium ribbon
Equivalent Noise Level: 17dB (A-weighted)
Frequency Response: 20Hz to 15kHz
Sensitivity: 8mV/Pa +/- 2dB (0dB = 1V/Pa @ 1kHz)
Polar Pattern: Figure-of-eight
Impedance: < 300 Ohms
Max SPL: 130dB (for 0.5% THD@1000Hz)
Connector: Eight-pin army connector

You'd have struggled to find much choice in the ribbon mic world a few years ago, particularly at the 'affordable'

end. But this has all changed, so much so that we're starting to see manufacturers take a few risks with their designs. Hot on the heels of the excellent R1-Ribbon mic, sE Electronics' latest offering incorporates a remarkable valve output stage.

With a number of phantom-powered ribbons already available, it's interesting to see they've not gone down that route. Though of course any powered ribbon, valve (or otherwise) should have a healthier output level, and this should be beneficial.

In typical sE style, the RT1 comes in a pro-quality flight case. Included are the mic, a dedicated power supply, a custom multicore cable and sE

suspension cradle. Both mic and PSU are striking (the latter has a distinctive brushed-steel case). The mic itself is longer than its R1 sibling, with the most obvious visual difference being the air vent on its backside. Peer through this and you'll see an sE-stamped ECC83A valve. Heat is always an issue wherever you use valves, and you'll notice that the RT1's suspension cradle is less enclosing than the one included with the R1. No doubt this aids heat dissipation (and aids valve life).

Valvin Sing

With everything connected, powering on the mic initiates a brief start-up cycle from the PSU and then there's a comforting click from an internal relay to tell you everything's ready. A quick look at the mic reveals a suitably glowing valve, and we're away.

Due to their inherent design, ribbon mics usually require plenty of gain (and hence a decent mic preamp). As I predicted, because of its valve stage, the RT1 has a healthy output level requiring around 50dB gain for speech.

Like the R1, the RT1 has a gentle roll-off for higher frequencies. This makes it instantly likeable not only for retro-sounding voice-overs, but also for use with instruments that have either excessive or complex high frequencies.

Get in close and you'll find that the RT1 also has lots going on in the lower frequencies. A pop shield is a must for vocals and even speech, and I must say, I found it very easy to make it pop without one. But even so it seemed capable of dealing with peaks without any nastiness. Indeed, I found myself tweaking down my mic pre gain to compensate.

Because of its figure-of-eight pickup pattern, used carefully the RT1 can help you isolate instruments without compromising your sound. In use the off-axis rejection (sides and top) is excellent. Interestingly, on-axis the front and back do sound slightly different, with the back slightly brighter with less proximity. This is very subtle, and I'm not sure whether it's by design or not – but even so it increases your options.

A rare find

Valve ribbon mics are very rare (as far as I know, the only other one currently in manufacture is Royer's R-122V – and that's twice the price of the RT1). Inevitably the valve circuitry takes the RT1 away from ribbon purist territory, but at the same time its healthy output level means mic preamp choice is much less critical.

Either way the RT1-Ribbon mic is an interesting and innovative move from sE, in the same way that their dual-valve Gemini is. At £935 it's not cheap, but then you wouldn't expect it to be, would you? Excellent. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
VALUE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
EASE OF USE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
VERSATILITY	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
RESULTS	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>

sE show their innovative side with this interesting rare valve ribbon microphone design.