

JZ Vintage 11

The latest introduction in the JZ Vintage series has **JON THORNTON** scratching his head looking for a mic model number that includes the number eleven.



Latvian microphone manufacturer JZ launched the first of its 'Vintage' range of microphones at the beginning of last year. Slightly odd looking (as I've come to expect from the company) but very nicely executed, the range to date has included the Vintage 67, Vintage 47 (*Resolution* V10.4) and most recently the Vintage 12. As recreations of classic designs, it's pretty easy to work out from the numbering system where each of these draws its inspiration. But the newest addition to the range had me scratching my head — Vintage 11? Try as I might I couldn't think of any classic microphone featuring that particular numeric designator. The answer is to be found in JZ's preliminary marketing information. The '11' comes from the year of introduction (2011), and I quote — "The number 11 stands for a 2011 as reference year when a new classic microphone has been created. Vintage 11 is dedicated for everyone who loves recording in highest quality possible and wants something better than all known studio standards." Talk about setting the bar high especially when coupled with a RSP of US\$699,

which is significantly less than the other microphones in the Vintage series.

Perhaps because of this, the Vintage 11 looks different from the other microphones in the range, although it retains a certain family resemblance. What you get is a package that is smaller in all dimensions, but that retains the same overall 'hip-flask' shape. You also lose the ball and socket integrated mount, which is replaced by a horseshoe-shaped swivel mount that attaches via two thumb screws to the base of the microphone. There was no suspension mount alternative supplied with the review model, which is a shame as, although there's a degree of internal shock-mounting of the capsule assembly, the Vintage 11 has also foregone the built-in suspension mounts between head-grille assembly and microphone body of its siblings — relying instead on a couple of rubber-like rings that form part of the clip.

The whole thing is finished in black with an all-metal construction, bits of which look like plastic but actually aren't. At this point I have to say that the review model wasn't the final production version in terms of looks and finish, so this could potentially change.

The internals though are production spec, and feature a capsule with a 27mm diaphragm that uses JZ's 'Golden Drop' sputtering technique. The capsule is mated to a fairly conventional discrete Class A transformerless output stage. A quick peek inside the mic body shows



that the electronics are more or less encased in a separate metal enclosure — one assumes for additional shielding.

Given the stated mission of the Vintage 11, I did something I normally don't, which is choosing mics for comparison that are in significantly different price brackets. This resulted in the Vintage 11 being arrayed against a Neumann U87, Brauner Phantom, Sony C800 and Sennheiser MKH800. For

the purposes of comparison, the variable pattern mics listed were set to cardioid, and filters and pads switched out. Mic preamp was a Millennia HV3-C.

First impressions with spoken word are that the Vintage 11 is very 'chunky' sounding — there's a very obvious low frequency hump centred around 100Hz even at some distance from the microphone. It certainly gives an initial impression, in comparison with everything else, of a much more 'in your face' sound. Move closer, and proximity effect only accentuates this and the sound becomes quickly overblown. Mid frequencies have a nice detail not quite as obviously present as the U87, and the top end seems to roll off reasonably early, giving an overall impression of a warm, smooth sound. Off-axis response is extremely good, with minimal colouration of the sound, and there's also a good consistency of response in the vertical plane.

It's a very flattering initial sound on spoken vocals and I'm already viewing this as an exceptional microphone for voice-over duties. But that 'chunkiness' does come at a cost — in comparison with nearly all of the other microphones (with the possible exception of the C800) there isn't quite the same level of HF detail to give that sense of intimacy. And while it sounds a good deal less brutally honest than the MKH800, particularly

with sung male vocals, I found myself having to reach for fairly aggressive amounts of HF shelving EQ to try and open up a little more 'air' to the sound.

Moving to percussion (an application I find the Brauner excels in) and there's a similar story. The Vintage 11 delivers a commendable performance on congas, tambourine and shaker and again seems to deliver a slightly larger than life, smooth sound. But it doesn't quite have that 'reach' of either the Brauner or Sennheiser in terms of feeling that you're actually in the room.

Acoustic guitar was its next challenge, and here it really held its own. That slightly elevated LF response helps in delivering a nice thick sound, while still being able to build a good distance between microphone and instrument for the purpose of overall balance. The other contenders certainly delivered a fundamentally brighter, and in some cases more detailed, sound but at the expense of lacking a little in body.

Reading this back, I'm conscious that I might sound a bit negative but step back from the rather bold marketing blurb for a moment and what you realise is that the Vintage 11 is actually a very capable, decent sounding microphone. It certainly has a distinctive character and while this might not suit every application, it delivers a sound that is always smooth and never brittle or harsh. Is it 'better than all known studio standards'? Well, in a word, no but then again that's an accolade you couldn't ascribe to any one microphone. Is it worthy of an audition? Absolutely. In fact, it will undoubtedly find a lot of fans among those who are looking for something that sounds a little less 'generic' than similarly priced microphones. ■

PROS

Larger than life sound; very smooth sounding top end; great for voice-over work; price.

CONS

LF response can get a little overwhelming at times; a little too soft sounding for some applications.

EXTRAS

JZ Microphones has introduced a Michael Wagener signature microphone kit consisting of a BT-201 small diaphragm cardioid condenser and a limited edition BT-301 medium diaphragm condenser. Engineer Wagener discovered the sound produced by the combination of the two microphones while tracking acoustic guitars.



The BT series was the second range to be released by JZ, following the Black Hole series microphones, and has interchangeable, magnetically attached capsules, offering cardioid, open cardioid, padded open cardioid (-20dB) and omni capsules. The distinctively shaped BT-301 is a limited edition medium sized cardioid condenser, which boasts a claimed low self noise spec of 5.5dBA.

Contact

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