

# SE Electronics X1R

It's a ribbon mic in a traditional sense at a keen price and with excellent build quality. **JON THORNTON** gets carried away on a wave of enthusiasm.

The latest in a string of ribbon microphones from SE Electronics might not have the most conservative moniker, but in terms of design and performance it's a return to a somewhat more traditional approach. After the introduction of the now discontinued R-1 ribbon, the company's focus with ribbon development has seemed to centre around trying to extend the HF response, while preserving their smooth, natural sound and transient response. The monolithic RNR-1 employed Rupert Neve-designed electronics and custom wound transformers to achieve this goal, while the later 'Voodoo' ribbons use patented internal acoustic trickery. It's clear that some of this experience has found its way in to the X1R, but the quest to make a ribbon's HF response closer to a capacitor microphone's seems to have been put to one side for the time being.

The microphone body seems to be identical to that used in the SE X1 large diaphragm capacitor save for the absence of any polar pattern or pad switches, and the finish is the same non-reflective rubberised coating that looks and feels high quality. This sharing of chassis components makes sense in an effort to keep costs down, and that's important here as SE has positioned the X1R to compete with a growing number of OEM ribbon offerings at the budget end of the market.

Internally there's a 2 micron ribbon element, accompanied by the now de-facto neodymium magnets. There are also some elements of the mechanical HF extension technology employed in the Voodoo range, although they aren't employed to the same extent here. Published figures show a normalised frequency response with a slight lift around 6kHz, and then a gradual roll-off from around 9-10k — pretty much what you'd expect to see in a ribbon design. The whole package feels solid, tightly screwed together and weighty, which is all the more reassuring given its relatively low price point (UK£299+ VAT).

It's a purely passive design, although sensibly there is some internal protection in the case of inadvertent phantom power application. The output is also fairly healthy and never really suggests that you'd run out of gain with most mic preamplifiers unless extremely quiet sources are the order of the day. Testing on this occasion was via my trusty Millennia HV3C preamp running straight into a Radar24, and for comparative purposes the X1R was arrayed against a Royer R-122 and a Beyer M160.

First impressions with spoken voice are that the X1R is not quite as bright as the Beyer (although the cardioid M160 does always sound a touch brighter to me than its fig-8 M130 stablemate). It's a little darker sounding than the R-122 as well, although it sounds weightier on spoken voice than either of the others. For voiceover work it will find fans — mellow and rich with just enough HF extension to cut neatly through a music bed. Move to sung vocals though, and you might just be wishing for a little more in this respect, and while it takes EQ well enough it can still sound a little dark for some genres.

The same characteristics, curiously, seem to work nicely on acoustic guitar though. A little HF shelving boost and a gentle cut in the low mids to keep things from getting too lumpy, and you get a result that tames a slightly-too-jangly guitar nicely. Unlike the RNR1 and Voodoo mics, you don't feel as if you're obliged to compare the X1R to a capacitor microphone here — instead the sound reminds me of a Beyer M201 dynamic with a little more definition and detail to the sound. It's a very nice result — nice enough that, when added to its obvious VO talent, there's more than enough reasons for me to start making space in the mic cupboard. But move onto electric guitar, and those reasons start to multiply.

The X1R really shines here, and never seems at all flustered in terms of absolute SPL handling, making me wonder whether that internal acoustic trickery is providing some additional degree of protection in this respect. It's particularly adept when mated to smaller guitar cabs driven hard. What you get here is a sense of scale and depth to the sound that seems out of all proportion to the diminutive cab, and with little sense of harshness. Yes, a little EQ helps to add some air, and the rear pick-up means that you get a little more room to the sound when working at any significant distance to the cab, but in the majority of cases this seems to be beneficial rather than problematic.

It's a return to basics, and an affordable one at that, and I think that the X1R is all the better for it. In many ways, and certainly on some guitar sounds, I prefer it to the more costly Voodoo range — it's got character and does what a ribbon mic should do. If there's a weak spot, it's the same weak spot as any passive ribbon — absolute output level. Still, I'm sure that could be solved by an enhanced, active version in the future, no doubt with an additional 'e' in the name — and that would be even SEX1eR.... ■



**PROS** No frills, smooth ribbon sound; price; build quality.

**CONS** Passive only; not quite as bright as some other passive ribbons; maybe not first choice for sung vocals.

**EXTRAS** The X1 cardioid condenser (about UK£116 + VAT) has a hand-built capsule, 10dB pad, low cut bass filter and is finished in black rubber, acoustically damping, paint. Sensitivity is claimed as -32dBV/Pa (25.1mV/Pa) along with an equivalent noise level of 16dB(A weighted) and a maximum SPL for 0.5% THD@1000Hz of 125dB.

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