

Audio-Technica AT3060

Famous for novel interpretations of common themes, A-T has an affordable valve mic powered via standard phantom. **JON THORNTON** emerges from the closet.

I'D BETTER START OUT by saying that I've always been a closet fan of Audio-Technica microphones – especially its more budget conscious ranges. Granted, it may not have the apparent heritage (or the price tag) of the German and Austrian brigade – but its products have always suggested to me a simple honesty in both their sound and their construction, and have proved to be dependable, long-term tools.

So I was kind of saddened when the AT3060 turned up for review. While the word 'tube' is not exactly plastered all over the packaging (actually it's quite understated) my initial reaction was that this was yet another mid-range capacitor microphone cashing in on the vogue of including a valve somewhere in the electronics to provide that elusive tube 'warmth'.

A couple of things, though, set this microphone apart from some others in this increasingly crowded market sector. The first is that it looks and feels reassuringly like an Audio-Technica should do – same general shape, a good weight and generally well engineered and screwed together. The AT3060's conservative, almost inscrutable exterior isn't trying too hard, and betrays no secrets – with no pads, filters or pattern select switches to speak of. Aah – you're thinking – they're probably sitting on the external supply unit. And that's the second, and most novel, distinguishing feature. There isn't one (an external power supply that is).

Instead Audio-Technica has managed to power the electronics, valve and all, from a standard 48v phantom supply. The phrase, 'what a great idea' flashes through my mind – closely followed by alarm bells as I try to figure the potential demands that such a system would place on a phantom power bus, and wonder exactly how big a plate voltage is employed.

Technical details are a little thin on the ground, but 5mA is quoted as the typical current draw – slightly



less than the non-valve AT4050. What is clear is that this is purely for the amplifier, as the capsule is actually a large-diaphragm back-electret design, offering a fixed cardioid response.

Having reassured myself that nothing nasty was going to befall the mixing console, the AT3060 was set up using the supplied shockmount, powered up and left to warm up for ten minutes. An output impedance of 400ohms together with whatever trickery is going on in that amplifier probably contribute to the fact that the output level of the microphone isn't terrifically high – requiring significantly more gain than a U87

that had been set up for comparison purposes.

In truth, I wasn't sure what to expect, and first impressions were of a sound dominated by mid-range presence and a slight exaggeration of breath sound and sibilance on vocals. This makes for an immediately 'close-up' sound in most vocal applications, which succeeds in being bright without being overly aggressive – although it's a close run thing with some vocalists.

Closer listening shows up a fairly steeply falling response below about 150Hz, which tended to make male vocals sound a little too thin unless miked very close. High frequency response also falls off fairly steeply above 15kHz, and while the gradual upwards slope of response from low to high frequencies gives immediately pleasing results on a lot of sounds, this is not a microphone that is going to reveal much in the way of high-frequency detail. As a result, distant sources particularly start to sound 'closed-in' quite quickly.

But what about that valve-induced warmth? Well, it certainly has a distinctive sound – and not an unpleasant one when used close up. In common with other valve mics, the AT3060 sounded best when used in the upper quartile of its dynamic range. With a male rock vocalist giving it some serious welly at close range all of those thermionic adjectives start threatening to make an

appearance. At other times I was left wondering just how much of this was the valve, and how much simply a capsule that had been tuned to sound like a 'classic' microphone – and one that occasionally sounded like it was trying just a little bit too hard.

The lack of an external supply is certainly an advantage from the set-up, storage, time saving point of view – although I'm still slightly uneasy about it as an engineering concept. What is clear, though, is that Audio-Technica hasn't just come up with a 'me-too' product. Instead, the AT3060 has a unique selling point and a sonic character all of its own, but is still indisputably an Audio-Technica. And I'm still a fan – which is a good thing. I'll come out of the (microphone) closet now. ■

PROS

No external supply needed; build quality; characterful sound.

CONS

Lack of absolute definition to high frequencies; sound possibly a little brittle for some applications; dependence on phantom power.

EXTRAS

Audio-Technica has come up with an intriguing solution to the business of kick drum miking. Following the popular practice of combining condenser and dynamic mics in the task, the AE2500 is unusual in combining condenser and dynamic cardioid mic elements within one mic housing with individual access to both signal paths via a 5-pin XLR.



Contact

AUDIO-TECHNICA, UK:

Tel: +44 113 277 1441

Website: www.audio-technica.co.uk