

BLUE Baby Bottle

The middle range condenser mic market is looking well populated, but what it's lacking is much in the way of individuality and attitude. **JON THORNTON** looks at a mic that's got bottle.



BLUE (BALTIK LATVIAN AUDIO ELECTRONICS) has been producing highly regarded, visually striking and superbly engineered microphones for some time. Manufactured in Riga, the BLUE microphone range has been gradually expanded, and includes as its flagship the fabulous BLUE Bottle.

The Baby Bottle is a recent addition to the family (the first of many awful puns), and represents an entry by the company into the mid-range studio capacitor market – which is starting to look pretty crowded at the moment.

The Baby Bottle has no problems standing out from

this crowd, being as visually striking as the rest of the BLUE range. Looking like the original Bottle that's been shrunk in the wash and painted a sparkly battleship grey, it features the trademark spherical 'lollipop' capsule assembly sitting atop a tube containing the electronics.

Build quality and attention to detail are extremely good, and don't seem to have suffered unduly from the pressures of achieving a particular price point. The microphone ships in an attractive cherry wood box, and comes as standard with a fixed swivel mount. An elastic suspension (the 'Baby Shock') is an optional extra, which is a shame, as is the missed opportunity to explore even more puns ('Baby Bouncer' or 'Baby's Cradle' anyone?)

Technically speaking the Baby Bottle features a single-membrane diaphragm, configured as a pressure gradient transducer with a cardioid response. The diaphragm is manufactured by BLUE itself in Riga, and is composed of mylar sputtered with a mixture of gold and aluminium. Electronics are discrete Class-A, with a transformerless output providing a source impedance of 50ohms. And that's your lot. No pad, no high-pass filter, no selectable polar pattern – maybe

less flexibility, but certainly fewer fiddly things to go wrong. A good, honest microphone then?

In use, it attracts comments from musicians, and looks like something very special. The first thing that you notice from the other side of the glass, though, is a significantly higher output than other capacitor mics in this class, which can only help in keeping overall noise figures down. Its first test was in recording female vocals, and for comparison an Audio-Technica 4050 and AKG 414 were also set up. First impressions were a little disappointing, as the microphone seemed to demonstrate a slight lift in mid frequencies, coupled with a noticeably earlier drop in high frequency response than the other microphones. This led to a reasonably full vocal sound, but one that sounded very closed-in in the mid-range. Moving the singer closer to the microphone only really made this worse, and while giving the microphone a little more space than I usually would helped a little, it still wasn't working for me.

Switching from the desk's mic preamps to a Focusrite ISA220 opened the high-frequency response up a good deal, but the real surprise was in switching singers. Same set-up, different female singer, and that

closed-in sound suddenly became real vocal presence – a lot nicer. And it got even better with male vocals, delivering a very lush, almost gravelly sound that worked well in the context of the track.

Meanwhile, something that had been niggling in the back of my mind was suddenly brought into focus by one of the musicians, who commented that from a certain angle the lollipop capsule looked just like an SM58. Anybody who has ever tried putting an SM57 or SM58 through a really high-quality mic preamp will immediately know what I'm talking about – a rounded, mellow sound but with a surprising openness and clarity in the top-end. And, with the greatest respect to BLUE, that's what the Baby Bottle had started to remind me of but without having to use the aforesaid preamplifier.

All of this leads on to the next part of the story, which was the obvious mental leap of using the Baby to mic an electric guitar cab. And the result was a revelation – a big, gutsy sound with lots of mid frequency bite, and with the added clarity that comes from the improved transient response of a capacitor microphone, particularly on clean guitar sounds. What was particularly good, though, was that the sound didn't suffer overly from revealing too much detail in the top end – the unwanted sizzle and 'warts and all' artefacts that other capacitor mics tend to exhibit in this application. And from that moment anything was fair game – acoustic guitar, snare drums, toms – all got a taste of the Baby Bottle. As an aside here, the 'unconventional' design of the mic actually makes it surprisingly easy to get nice and tight on a snare drum without exposing it to the danger of death by drumstick.

At the end of the day, this is not just another wannabe mid-range capacitor – it is a microphone

with a character all its own, and one that works extremely well in a lot of contexts. It isn't a microphone that has been designed to meet an anodyne specification, but one that has been designed to be a tool in the hands of an imaginative engineer with (UK)£599 to spend.

You really need to listen to this microphone if you are contemplating adding to your stock – so it's just as well that the UK distributors offer a unique service. Sonic Distribution will loan any of the microphones in the BLUE range to any end user – not just dealers – so long

as you have a valid credit card. This works just like using a credit card to book a hotel room – no charge is added, but the details are pre-authorised. This loan arrangement includes delivery and collection of the item to your door. It would almost seem rude not to... ■

Contact

BLUE, US:
Website: www.bluemic.com
UK, Sonic Distribution: +44 1582 843900

PROS

Novel design; great looks; distinctive sound; attractive price.

CONS

Distinctive sound may not suit all tastes or applications – a real case of need to try before you buy.

EXTRAS

Responsible for some barmy named mics, like the Mouse, Blueberry and Kiwi to name a few, BLUE now has a Phantom-powered dynamic (you read it right) to throw at you called the Ball, because, well, it looks like a ball.

BLUE argues that sticking some power up the line counters frequency-dependent variable resistance, which it claims has dramatic effects on the transducer's acoustic balance, phase coherence, noise specification and overall output. What we're talking about here is a phantom-powered active balancing circuit in the Ball's output stage.

The fact that it's round and nicely weighted presumably helps accuracy when targeting distant slow moving objects.

