

Brauner Phanthera V

Following on from the original FET-design Phanthera, the new model adds a V for 'variable' pattern. **JON THORNTON** assesses the difference that a diaphragm and a couple of switches make.

OK, the story so far... In 1993 Dirk Brauner decided to design and build the best microphone he possibly could. Working from a converted barn, he eventually produced his first commercial product, the VM1. This in turn spawned a range of other microphone offerings from the young German company that all had one thing in common — they employed valves in their electronics. It wasn't until 2001 that Brauner produced a FET-based design with the introduction of the Phantom.

Throughout this fairly rapid process of development and growth (which has resulted in a recent move to a new production facility in Germany), two things have remained constant. The first is Brauner's belief that a microphone is a creative tool as much as a technical instrument. So while you can view figures for noise and sensitivity in the spec sheets, you'll never find a published frequency response chart for any Brauner product. Instead you're invited to judge them by simply listening.

The second is the maintenance of two distinct groups of broad tonality within the Brauner product portfolio. Broadly speaking, these tonalities could be described as 'natural' and 'coloured' and the valve-based designs have offerings in both groups. As far as the FET designs go, the original fixed pattern Phanthera was introduced last year as a foil for the very pristine sounding Phantom. The Phanthera V on test today is the newly introduced variable pattern version.

Visually, the Phanthera V (UK£1796 + VAT) is almost identical to the Phanthera — it comes with the now familiar snap-to-fit shockmount and is supplied in a small aluminium case complete with a Vovox mic cable. The most obvious differences are the double headed capsule lurking inside the head grille, a three-position pattern select switch (omni, cardioid and fig-8) and a -10dB pad. The microphone looks just as well screwed together as the rest of the range, and the published figures quote a respectable

Equivalent Noise figure of <11dBA and a sensitivity of 33mV/Pa — it's got a pretty hot output.

Starting with the cardioid pattern selected, and it's clear that the addition of another diaphragm hasn't changed the key characteristics of the Phanthera V on vocals. A much darker sounding proposition than the Phantom, it works well with male and female vocals. Chest sounds are more pronounced, and worked close-in there's a definite sense of low-mid enhancement

to the sound in addition to the expected proximity effect. Despite this, the high-end remains open and bright, capturing a lot of nuance and detail — perhaps with a slight tendency to exaggerate sibilance and spit noise with some singers. In general, it's a little more forgiving than the Phantom on most voices, particularly those that need a little more weight than they naturally possess. The original intention with the Phanthera was to try to create a FET-based microphone that possessed many of the sonic characteristics of a valve-based design, and when I reviewed it, it was clear that this had been successful.

The transition to a multi-pattern variant hasn't lost any of these qualities.

In cardioid mode, the pickup pattern is quite wide, which means that placing the Phanthera V quite close on an acoustic guitar (pointing down the neck towards the sound-hole) gives quite a balanced sound. Switching to the omni pattern opens up the sound somewhat, although the tendency of the microphone to emphasise low-mids (circa 250Hz) does tend to exaggerate any innate 'honk'

in rooms of a certain size. This was also true of using the Phanthera V as a room microphone while recording a drum kit. In some ways the sound here is very useable as it manages

the difficult task of capturing transient information without sounding at all thin — but it needed a touch of EQ to stop the low-mids sounding overblown. Switching the polar response to fig-8 in the same position with the null facing the drum kit also helped cure this — although judging by the shift in tonality achieved when moving the microphone slightly, this is probably more to do with phase/position than something innate in this pick-up pattern.

Although most potential users would inevitably choose the Phanthera V as a vocal mic in the first instance, I also decided to try it as a close microphone on a guitar cab — back on the cardioid pattern and about 6 inches from the speaker. The pad proves essential in this application, and the results were actually quite striking. Rolling off a little of the high end helps here, as unlike many 'vintage' tube microphones or replicas the mic doesn't have a marked HF roll-off. The sound was not unlike using a ribbon microphone such as the Beyer M160 or Royer 122 — a nice smooth low end that sounds dark without being muffled, but with a little more attack to the sound.

Adding selectable patterns and the pad has certainly made the Phanthera a more useful studio workhorse — in fact the omission of these was about the only negative comment I had about the original. More to the point, it seems that despite Brauner's growth and change of production facility, the qualities that I associate with the products have remained intact. Still can't quite get used to that name though... ■



PROS

Good sounding vocal microphone capable of bringing out added character with some voices; adds a hint of valve warmth; variable patterns and pad increase flexibility of application.

CONS

Can exaggerate room tone in some applications; 'I know, go and get the Phanthera from the mic cupboard!' still doesn't quite roll off the tongue...

EXTRAS

Both the Phanthera and the Phantom Classic microphones are now being offered in a more budget friendly basic edition that comes with elementary accessory equipment only.



Contact

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