CAD Trion 6000 + 8000

Trion is the family name for the latest range of offerings from CAD. Some readers may be unfamiliar with the name, but they've been in the microphone business since 1988. In common with many brands at these price points, manufacturing takes place in China, although the company is headquartered in Ohio. JON THORNTON

THE TRION RANGE currently comprises the 6000, 7000 and 8000 microphones. The 7000 is a dual-ribbon design, which we'll leave for another time, and instead concentrate on the two large diaphragm condenser offerings.

Both the 6000 (UK£235 inc. VAT) and the 8000 (UK£325 inc. VAT) follow the same basic form factor — a retro-inspired 'lollipop' look, with the capsule assembly sitting atop a cylindrical base containing the electronics. Both offer switchable polar patterns (omni, fig-8 and cardioid), but whereas the 6000 features discrete Class-A solid-state electronics, the 8000 adds a valve into the equation.

However, this isn't simply a case of taking the same capsule and housing and offering two variants of the electronics — the 6000 and 8000 are completely different microphones. The 8000 is physically larger and heavier, and sports a 1.12-inch diaphragm compared to the 6000's 1-inch affair. Both microphones ship with an aluminium carrying case containing a shockmount and, in the case of the 8000, an external power supply.

Gaining access to the internals of both microphones is a simple process and a brief poke around reveals some tidy looking circuit boards in both cases together with transformers on the output stages of both mics. The valve in the 8000 looks easy to access for replacement, although the exact type isn't one that I've come across before. The printing on it would seem to imply that it is of Chinese manufacture — so I'm guessing something broadly equivalent to a 12AX7. Build quality of both microphones seems good although the shockmount looks a little on the cheap side.

The published specs show that neither microphone is possessed of the greatest of output levels (13mV/Pa for the 6000 and 14mV/Pa for the 8000). This in itself isn't a problem, but when taken together with self-noise figures of 20 and 21dBA, they do sound comparatively noisy when gained up alongside other microphones.

Starting with the 6000, male vocals on the cardioid setting delivered a sound with plenty of presence, but quite edgy sounding. Moving slightly off-axis to try and counter this wasn't terrifically successful — off-axis the microphone loses HF detail very quickly, but this didn't seem to get rid of the slightly abrasive quality. The 6000 reminded me most of an SE Z5600, although to my ears the SE sounds smoother. Moving closer onto the mic gives quite a big proximity bump but this sounded somewhat disconnected from the overall tonality of the mic.

In comparison, on the same vocal source the 8000 was a completely different story. Again, a sound full of presence — just a little sizzly on the 'S' sounds — but with none of the high-mid harshness of the 6000. Moving closer in and the 8000 really starts to come into its own on vocals. Again, there's a big proximity bump — even more pronounced than the 6000 — but here it sounds completely dialled in with the overall response, smooth and progressive if potentially a little too extreme on some voices.

Moving on to acoustic guitar for both mics told much the same story. Positioning both in this application was a little unwieldy, especially the 8000, which although not in SE Gemini territory, is still a sizeable chunk of hardware. Again, starting with the cardioid pattern, the 6000 revealed plenty of articulation detail on picked pieces, and delivered a nice jangly pop sound on strummed pieces, but really lacked any sense of depth when compared to a C414 in the same position. The 8000 was actually very good; at about 12-inches away there was plenty of bass extension, good HF detail and much more in the way of harmonic definition in the low and high mids. Moving in any closer though and that hefty proximity bump starts to make things sound a little too boomy very quickly. A quick switch to the omni pattern soon sorts this out, but at the expense of ever so slightly less HF detail.

For completeness' sake both microphones were positioned as room mics on a drum kit, with both the omni and fig-8 (null point facing the kit) patterns selected. Admittedly, it wasn't the most flattering sounding room and on the small side, but even so the 8000 sounded well balanced and reasonably neutral in both omni and fig-8 configurations. In fig-8 mode, the 6000 also performed reasonably well — slightly more high-mid presence than the 8000 which made things sound a little fluttery at times — but its omni response seemed all over the place, sounding brittle and boxy.

So, two microphones from the same range and to me they're like chalk and cheese. There's a tremendous amount of competition around at the price-points these microphones sit at and while the 6000 is a capable performer it never really seemed the best choice for any of the applications it faced. The 8000 though is a thoroughly versatile performer with plenty of character of its own; it should give the competition a good run for the money. ■

PROS 8000 is smooth sounding and flexible with great LF extension when used close; both good looking in a quirky retro sort of way.

CONS 6000 might be a little too brittle sounding for some tastes; shockmounts don't seem to match the build quality of the rest of the package; not as quiet as some competitors.

EXTRAS The Trion 7000 is a dual-ribbon fig-8 mic that employs two ultra-thin aluminium ribbons.

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