

Røde NT4

With a price not that far removed from the cost of an appropriate branded suspension and windgag, this substantial Antipodean tips the price/performance scale firmly in its favour. **NEIL HILLMAN** is roused to sing praise for the fuller figure.

ACCOMPANIED BY THE WORDS 'Oh...my; Mrs Robinson', my first seminal cinematic moment – and I suspect that of many other young, hormone-crazed boys of a certain age – had arrived. Director Mike Nichols broke new ground with his movie *The Graduate*. In photographic terms, he had the courage of his convictions to hold locked-off frames for the entire duration of Simon and Garfunkel songs; in purely emotional terms, he ensured that it would be some years before I could again look at several of my aunts without feeling my passion rising.

I tell you this not so much to exorcise these sordid, unhealthy parts of my past but to advise that a similar sense of excitement awaits the unsuspecting and the susceptible when the Røde NT4 first reveals itself; lying stripped of its black, delicate accessories, among the soft cushioning of the supplied semi-hard case. Looks, however, as the mature man within me now acknowledges, are only skin deep; so my Australian NT would certainly have to live up to closer scrutiny now that my skin is more wrinkly than spotty.

Touted by Røde as a budget-conscious solution for location and studio stereo recording, the NT4 makes its co-incident pair operating principle immediately obvious, with its two 'matched' cardioid diaphragm's mounted rigidly and robustly end-fire, at 90° to each other, giving an effective pick-up of 170°. The two microphone elements are powered by 48V phantom or by a standard 9V battery housed within the deceptively heavy body that feels as if it has been machined from 1940s Holden conrods. This weight affords it the kind of respect normally reserved for other substantial professional tools such as ball-peen hammers or fairground mallets.

The estimated useful life of the battery is given at about 400 hours, from a power consumption of 2.4mA, slightly higher than its figure of 2mA from an external phantom power supply. A recessed ellipse on the main body houses the battery on/off switch with an associated red LED. Healthy battery power is indicated by a once-per-second LED flash while more sustained illumination signifies failing in battery voltage.



The 13mm diameter condenser capsules are supported by active electronics using JFET technology for impedance conversion, with a bipolar output-buffer. The output impedance of each capsule is 2000ohms and other figures claimed are a frequency response from 20Hz to 20kHz, signal-to-noise ratio of 78dB, and a dynamic range greater than 128dB.

I can see the merits of using an NT4 in studio close-miked applications as it sounded particularly rounded with acoustic guitar, as it happens. My initial prejudice would be against using an X-Y recording source for journeyman location assignments, given the more general and unpredictable nature of that work. I have a belief that perspective can be lost when compared to the imaging generated by a quality M+S microphone.

However, the imaging of the NT4 is impressively precise out-of-doors, with good mono compatibility and a clear coverage down to the two-digit, bottom-end frequencies that for most boom-pole operations would be rolled-out, as modesty should dictate. Sensible suspension and windshielding is imperative of course for such work, as the supplied sculpted foam gag is of little use, except perhaps decorative, in conditions above the lightest breeze. While a suspension is necessary if the microphone is to move anywhere from a static operation, a new modular suspension and windgag from Rycote will double the cost of the whole set-up, illustrating the incredible value-for-money this microphone represents.

The good news is that the NT4 fits into a Sennheiser 416 basket and suspension (the like of which almost always forms the most fundamental part of any recordist's kit). It requires only new, larger, 30mm clips and beefier elastics; all easily available by post from Rycote, and matching the cost-efficiency that this remarkable microphone offers.

And I suppose that I would use this very point to underpin my judgement as to whether Røde's vision of the NT4 as a 'mic-for-all-men' (and women, obviously too; it just doesn't scan as well) stands up to scrutiny. It's a microphone that I would definitely, no shadow of a doubt, want to add to my armoury for location work. I could find very many times and situations where this

microphone would earn its keep – on music, choirs, atmos tracks, and wild tracks – but not, if I'm honest, at the expense of my indispensable M+S shotgun microphone.

At these prices though, it really doesn't need to be. This first stereo microphone from Røde has beauty that really is more than skin deep. It simply sounds as good as it looks.

Indeed, as my favourite aunt at the time appeared to me, the Røde NT4 is striking from each and every angle you chance to view it from; and similarly, like her, it's heavier than perhaps it should be. It certainly has a fuller bottom-end than might be apparent at first. But the biggest difference is that this NT is available to you, right now, at blood-pounding, pulse-quickenening little cost; financially or emotionally. So go with that base instinct young man; honestly, they can't touch you for it. ■

PROS Superb performance and price; ideal for straight inputs to 'semi-pro' DAT and MD with supplied 3.5mm output lead.

CONS It's a heavy beast at the end of a pole; handling noise could be an issue.

EXTRAS Building on the success of the original Classic, and now the most expensive Røde you can buy, the upgraded Classic MkII features a new edge-terminated diaphragm for improved frequency response, transient characteristics and SPL handling. Like its predecessor, the MkII continues to use the rare GE6072 valve in conjunction with a Jensen output transformer but uses a redesigned power supply for lower noise. A dual foil-shielded multistrand cable is also new, as is a heavy-duty shockmount.



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