

# Røde NT5

Daring to suggest a stereo 'matched' mic pair for substantially less than half the cost of most others, the Australians are at it again.

Should you look at them as a pair or a set of two?

JON THORNTON

**T**HOSE CLEVER ANTIPODEANS at Røde have been busy again. Over the last few years they have developed a reputation for introducing microphones that sit very attractively on the price/performance curve, while not making too many compromises in the appearance and durability of the products. In fact, the continued introduction of new models after the success of the original NT1 can sometimes make it hard to keep track of them all. So where does the NT5 fit in?

Building on the introduction of the slightly alien looking NT4 stereo microphone, the NT5 has been designed to sell as a closely matched pair for stereo recording applications. This allows users to use a wider range of stereo techniques – spaced, coincident or near coincident pairs, rather than the fixed-angle XY arrangement of the NT4. Nothing revolutionary there you might think, until you remember that matched pairs of microphones have traditionally meant serious money.

In any stereo microphone arrangement (with the

possible exception of an M-S configuration), close matching of the frequency response and other characteristics of the microphones is paramount in ensuring an accurate stereo field. Given that there will be differences in manufacturing tolerances and materials, even identical models may not be that closely matched – and as a microphone lives its life and is subjected to a variety of operating environments, these differences can become even more pronounced.

Røde don't quote how closely a pair of NT5s is matched – there is certainly no individual frequency plot for each microphone – but consecutive serial numbers on the pair suggests that there is some consistency in their manufacture and selection. Each pair of NT5s is shipped in a plastic case with two mic clips and two foam windshields.

Taking a single microphone to begin with, the NT5 is a compact unit, slightly narrower and slightly longer than a Neumann KM184. The polar response is cardioid, which is fairly uniform between 1kHz and 8kHz. Røde quote the frequency response as 20Hz to 20kHz, although it's apparent from the frequency plot in the documentation that the high frequency response rolls off quite significantly between about 12kHz and 20kHz.

The capsule is an externally polarised, 1/4-inch pressure gradient type, and can be unscrewed from the amplifier and output stage, perhaps suggesting that Røde may intend to offer alternative capsules at some point in the future. Build quality seems to be generally good, and other than the trademark Røde gold dot on the body, that's all there is to it. For flexibility, I'd have liked to see some form of switchable high pass filter, and perhaps a pad as well.

In use, the NT5's compact size makes positioning single microphones on instruments and setting up the pair on a stereo bar very easy and tidy. The clips that are supplied hold the microphones very snugly, and the microphone mates firmly with an XLR connector. Used on an acoustic guitar, a single NT5 sounded generally pleasing, with little colouration to the sound in the mid range – in all a reasonably similar character to an AKG C451. Low frequency response sounded a touch thin by comparison, and the high frequency roll off mentioned earlier does manifest itself in a loss of some detail – particularly high frequency transients. The output level, while not very low, does require a touch more input gain than similar microphones. The self-noise of the microphone is low enough that this isn't really too much of a problem.

A coincident pair of NT5's set up as drum overheads produced good results – the low frequency response being less of an issue, and HF roll-off tending to ensure that the cymbals didn't get too thrashy.

Although there is a certain comfort in knowing that your drum overheads are a matched pair this is not the most critical of applications. So, with the aim of finding out how the NT5s perform in a slightly more demanding role, they were set up in an ORTF arrangement to record a small group of backing singers. A crude A/B check of both microphones prior

to setting them up had showed them to be tonally extremely similar, but without performing a full response test it is hard to know exactly how closely they are matched. However, the ORTF pair performed very well in terms of perspective and imaging, even at the extremes of the stereo image.

Although they wouldn't necessarily be my first choice for stereo work at any great distance due to their HF response, even a single NT5 would be a useful addition to a microphone cupboard – particularly in a facility where a lot of close instrument miking is the norm. For the money you might spend on a similar microphone, you get a matched pair of NT5s. Although you could quibble about exactly how closely they might be matched, they certainly perform well in most stereo applications.

As importantly, the fact they are purchased and, most probably, used and stored as a pair will help to ensure that they get the best chance of retaining their matched characteristics over time. Not quite a case of 'buy one get one free', but close enough to warrant a listen. ■



**PROS** Compact dimensions make for easy positioning; closely matched response; reasonably priced for a matched pair

**CONS** Lack of high pass filter and pad; sensitivity an issue for stereo work at a distance

**EXTRAS** Røde's NT4 stereo location microphone employs a pair of matched half-inch cardioid capsules in a 90° XY configuration. It claims a 20Hz to 20kHz frequency response, high sensitivity and output, and an SPL of 143dB.

An internal 9V battery can be left in place even when the mic is being phantom powered, while an external 9V option and stereo mini-jack connector enable it to be used with video cameras.



## Contact

**RØDE, AUSTRALIA:**  
**Website:** [www.rode.com.au](http://www.rode.com.au)  
**UK:** HHB, +44 208 962 5000