

# SE Electronics Gemini V & G3500

Sharing the ethos of other models with the same name there is still more to these latest offerings than meets the eye. JON THORNTON tries out two new mics, or it that three?

Before we begin, a little history. In the beginning was the original Gemini microphone — so called because it featured not one, but two valves. Impedance conversion and output stages were taken care of thermionically, and the result was a microphone with a sound that was somewhat larger than life — almost as large, in fact, as its not inconsiderable girth and weight. Gemini 1 was followed a few years later by the slightly tweaked and improved Gemini 2. And then in 2010, SE Electronics' 10th anniversary was marked by a limited run (333 total manufactured) of the Gemini 3 featuring multiple polar patterns and a matt black rubberised coating first seen on the 4400a. I've no idea what happened to Gemini 4 (the microphone, not the space mission) but that leaves us with the new Gemini 5.

The first thing to make clear is that the Gemini 5 is not a replacement for what we might term the 'classic' Gemini, as the Gemini 2 is still very much part of the product line-up. The reason for this is that the new kid on the block represents a branch off the family tree, rather than a direct descendant. The shared DNA is in the capsule, which is the same 1-inch centre-terminated affair used in the Gemini 2, but what's not clear from the picture is that the Gemini 5 appears to have shrunk in the wash when compared to its older sibling. It's still a fair heft, mind you, so despite being about 30% smaller in every dimension a sturdy mic stand is very much the order of the day.

Underneath the familiar battleship grey enclosure things have also changed. Actually, they change before you get there, as to gain access to the innards you now actually have to undo some screws first rather than simply grabbing hold of the base and unscrewing it. But if you clear that particular technical hurdle, what you're confronted with is not a pair of valves but rather a single, socketed ECC83A. So why then does this new addition call itself a 'Gemini'?

All is revealed when you turn your attention to



the accompanying PSU. Connected via a supplied 8-pin cable, at first glance it seems to be a fairly standard valve mic supply. Then you realise that there are two separate XLR outputs — one labelled 'Tube' and the other 'FET'. Yes, what we have here is a microphone with a split personality, featuring a valve-based and a discrete FET-based output stage that are available as outputs simultaneously. Of course, the main advantage of this approach is that it's a trivial process to record both outputs simultaneously leaving the decision about which sounds better until the mix stage when things are a little clearer. Obviously, the success of this approach is largely dependent on exactly what the character of each output is, and how widely they differ.

Starting with female vocals, and put up against our original Gemini, it's clear that SE has taken a slightly different approach with the tube output of the Gemini 5. It isn't the same very modern sound that the Gemini provides, instead giving a slightly darker, understated character to the voice without that added HF sparkle that the original Gemini provides. That's not so say that it sounds at all dull or closed in — in fact it probably sounds more classically like a tube condenser than the original Gemini does. There's a nice progressive fall in the HF after a little presence peak that takes EQ well if you need to brighten things up a little, and a solid LF response. It's in the high mids where that ECC83 starts to strut its stuff; work the mic close and a combination of proximity effect and a certain gutsiness in the mid frequencies comes into play. What's nice is that it is a very subtle effect. It doesn't sound at all hyped in a quest to give what the ill-informed might perceive as being the 'valve sound', so things never start to sound overly 'phlegmy' or cluttered. Switch to male vocals, and this characteristic is even more pronounced.

Pulling up the FET output on the desk, and it really is like listening to a different microphone. HF response opens up considerably, and the sense that some of the transients in the source are being softened slightly disappears. Again, it's really the mid-range that changes most significantly. What you get here is a sound that is open and honest, and resolves the detail of a singer's articulation almost to the extent of being a little unflattering when mated to preamps like a Millennia HV3. And if you can't really make



up your mind, there's some fun to be had in mixing the two outputs together — in fact, it was when doing this that the sound started to sound closer in character to the original Gemini.

The FET output by itself needs its own comparison though and in this case a Neumann TLM103 and an AKG C414 were chosen as being similar in terms of price point. In truth, sonically it sits somewhere between the two. It's a little brighter sounding than the TLM103, and doesn't have quite that pronounced mid-frequency lift that can help with some vocal sounds. But it doesn't have the (sometimes brutal) honesty of the 414, or quite the reach at the extreme low end. That said, it's an accomplished microphone that never sounds unduly flustered or out of its depth.

And this is where the G3500 comes in. What you get here is effectively a FET only Gemini 5 — same capsule, same FET-based electronics but without the valve stage or

associated external power supply.

The casework and size is also identical, although the G3500 weighs fractionally less than the Gemini 5. Both microphones are supplied with hard cases and elastic suspension mounts. With prices of UK£849 for the Gemini V and £649 for the G3500 (both + VAT) they aren't bargain basement propositions and have some pretty tough competition in their price point. I really liked the Gemini 5 — it may sound clichéd, but it really is two microphones for the price of one. ■

## PROS

Built like a tank; ability to record FET and tube outputs simultaneously; two very different responses; smooth, unhyped tube sound (Gemini 5).

## CONS

Utilitarian aesthetic; solid mic stand needed to hold them firmly.

## EXTRAS

The Voodoo ribbon mics from SE claim a 20Hz to 20kHz performance that is achieved by means of a patent pending mechanical device designed by SE CEO Siwei Zou. The VR2 is an active version of the VR1.



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