



SE 4400a & T2

There's a lot of versatility and value to be had from a good dual-diaphragm multipattern mic. **JON THORNTON** investigates SE's two takes on a general-purpose, high quality, large diaphragm capacitor.

Whether up close and personal or squinting from a distance, the initial visual similarity between the SE4400a and a well known multipattern large diaphragm microphone of Austrian origin must be obvious to even the most uncritical of eyes. Closer inspection of the 4400a shows that in reality it's a little larger and flatter and the construction marks a departure from SE's typical tube shaped designs, which although fairly utilitarian looking, did make access to the innards extremely easy for servicing or just plain nosiness. The 4400a is much more compact than those designs and inspecting the innards would now require the use of a screwdriver; so I restrained myself. The main body of the microphone is of metal coated with a non-reflective material that seems soft, almost rubbery to the touch. This means that reflections from lighting, whether on stage or in a TV studio, is never going to be an issue aided by the fact that SE has not employed a 'shiny-side/black-side' approach to the head grille.

The 4400a has mechanical slide switches and these feel reassuringly positive in use and look like they have been engineered to last. They are also all located on the same side of the microphone, so all settings can be seen at a glance without having to bob around to the back. Two three-position switches give access to a pad (0, -10 or -20dB) and a high pass filter (flat, 60Hz or 120Hz). A further three-position switch selects polar pattern (omni, fig-8, cardioid), while a final two-position switch determines whether the cardioid pattern is normal or hypercardioid.

The unit supplied for review was part of a matched stereo pair kit, which includes two microphones, a stereo bar and two shockmounts in a compact hard case. The company and its distributor are particularly proud of the shockmount, which doesn't completely enclose the microphone but is open at the front. The advantages of this are threefold. First, it means that there's good access to the switches on the mic body.

Second, it allows the microphone to be swivelled forward to any angle while still in the mount. And finally, if necessary, the collar that holds the neck of the microphone can be swivelled through 180 degrees, allowing the mic to stand proud of the actual shock mount assembly so it can be positioned very close to sound sources (guitar cabs, snare drums, etc.) without the mount getting in the way. It's pretty neat and it works well. There's still a slight utilitarian look to it, in common with other SE mounts but it's a step in the right direction and complements the visual appearance of the microphone itself.

Internally there's a 1-inch, centre-terminated dual diaphragm capsule that is derived from the single diaphragm design used in the SE2200a. Sensitivity is good (quoted at 14.1mV/Pa) and equivalent noise a respectable, if not massively quiet 17dB(A).

I have to admit that I had some preconceptions about how the 4400a would sound before I put it up in the studio, based entirely on my experience of other SE designs. While the rest of the range never has the strained, splashy character of some Chinese manufactured microphones, they still tend to sound a little bit bright in comparison to European counterparts. So I was pleasantly surprised that, with the cardioid setting on vocals, acoustic guitar and percussion all brittleness seems to have been completely dialled out. In comparison to the latest 414, the 4400a is a tiny bit brighter and perhaps doesn't have quite the low

frequency reach — but these characteristics are not necessarily a bad thing, as they tend to make the 4400a slightly more flattering on many sources.

Switching to omni and fig-8 patterns does change this tonality a surprising amount — the sound hardens up a little, and the omni pattern in particular seems to be a little uneven as you move around the axis of the microphone. The 4400a isn't unusual in this regard, as this is common with many dual diaphragm designs but it does seem quite noticeable here. However, in general, the microphone does a very respectable job in a number of applications and does it in a very natural, open and unhyphenated fashion.

Of course, for some applications these tonal characteristics can be just that little bit too restrained and SE has an answer for that in the T2. This microphone has the same form factor of the 4400a but is finished in silver rather than that very matte

black. The key differences are more than cosmetic though, as while it shares the same electronics and chassis as the 4400a, the capsule is completely different. It's actually the capsule from the Titan, which featured diaphragms coated in titanium rather than gold. The idea here is that titanium is lighter and stiffer than gold, which should translate to a superior transient response.

The T2 does sound very different to the 4400a and these differences are most obvious on percussion and vocals, where it adds a sense of definition and edge to the sound that makes it sound almost hyper-real. It's a very different effect to simply tuning the diaphragm differently or fiddling with the electronics, as the differences are very dependent on the source being recorded, rather than an overall brighter tonality. Enhanced crispness is probably the best description I can come up with but again with no sense of ever

sounding brittle or strained.

I went into this review almost not wanting to like these microphones — I've always been and remain a big fan of AKG's workhorse — but these microphones aren't trying to copy the 414, instead they've been inspired by it. They are both a little less brutally honest, but achieve what they set out to do, which is to be a genuinely useful, versatile all-round studio tool. I'd go so far as to say that, all things considered, these are probably the best microphones SE has yet produced, and should be seen as the company coming of age. I'd certainly not hesitate to give them mic cupboard space. ■

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PROS

Compact size; flexible suspension mount makes positioning very easy; smooth and unflustered sound; T2 works extremely well on percussion and voice; 4400a is a good all-rounder.

CONS

Response gets a little lumpy in fig-8 and omni modes; not quite as neutral as a 414.

EXTRAS

SE is shipping new MI products leading up to 2010 and its 10th anniversary.

The X1 large diaphragm condenser is hand-built in SE's own facility and boasts a 10dB pad and bass cut. The SE Project Studio Reflexion Filter uses the same basic design as the Pro version but omits the multiple layers and acoustic boundaries of that version and replaces them with the same, patented, polyester acoustic board. It is then lined with a high grade, high density crystal foam with a unique curved ridge cut.

The company is also bundling the X1 with the Project Studio RF and its established sE2200a with the Reflexion Filter.

