RØDECaster Pro

KEVIN HILTON (cue drumroll) goes podcasting

RØDE describes this product, outside its core microphone business, as an 'all in one podcast studio device'. Which sums it up quite neatly. In appearance the RØDECaster Pro resembles the new breed of digital radio consoles, with linear faders and multi-coloured indicators and trigger buttons. The desk is angled comfortably and feels reassuringly solid and weighty, although not overly heavy.

Set-up is relatively straightforward, which is just as well because there is no instruction manual, only illustrated cards giving a graphical run-down of what the various channels, buttons, inputs and outputs are for. The user is left to get into the console themselves to understand what everything does.

The RØDECaster Pro can be connected to your PC or laptop, using a supplied Micro USB (out) to standard USB cable that is sensibly long enough to get from the console on a desk to a CPU on the floor. This connection provides access to both recording software and music or speech files on the computer. I used Audacity on my PC, which recognised the RØDECaster Pro as the default mic input. As an alternative to this, particularly for location recording where it might be impractical to bring a laptop, a microSD card can be slotted into the rear panel to produce 24-bit 48kHz WAV files.

/ **Four separate headphone feeds are ideal for multiple guests**

Currently these have to be transferred using a card reader, but RØDE is planning to implement direct-transfer over USB at some point in the future.

My initial reaction was that the RØDECaster Pro is top-heavy with microphones and headphones, but I came to the conclusion that having four of each makes sense, because so many podcasts are based around a host and several guests. The channel count allows for a sizeable number of contributors but restricts how many other inputs can be brought in at the same time.

On the console panel, working from left to right, are the four numbered mic channels, the USB/computer channel, phone input channel and a channel for a Bluetooth connection. Each of these has two push buttons underneath, one for solo, the other to mute. The fader knobs are silver and lightweight but not tacky feeling, with the faders running surprisingly smoothly for a mixer in this price bracket.

Cue the laughter!

On the right-hand side of the desk is a section for playing out sounds. This has its own fader channel (with solo button) and eight colour-coded soft buttons. These trigger a pre-loaded selection of effects, including applause, laughter and a ba-ba-ba-tish rimshot. There is the option to record your own sounds on to the 512MB internal memory. This is done easily by holding down the desired pad and playing in the new sound from computer or mobile sources.

Above the effects pads are rotaries for loudspeaker volume (one) and headphone level (four). A reassuring feature of the RØDECaster Pro is that it has an in-built maximum level limiter on the headphone circuit. The Number 1 cans volume control can also be used for a 3.5mm jack input located on the front edge of the console, as well as for the designated 6.3mm jack input.

Next to the record pad is a graphical display. The standard configuration is a meter showing the individual channel levels, plus a Left-Right master output. There is no indication what metering scale is being used and no numbering, only dark green vertical LEDs turning a lighter green and then reddish if the channel over-modulates.

The source microphone has to be

selected before the metering responds. This is done by pushing the numbered blue button above the desired mic channel; there is then a choice of RØDE microphones (PodMic, Procaster, Broadcaster, NT1, NT1-A and NT2-A), plus condenser (what I was using) or dynamic. The level set-up is a basic horizontal LED meter with plus or minus.

More advanced menus are available, giving access to the 'Aphex on Board' processing. This offers a compressor, de-esser, ducking (on Channel 1 only, allowing the host's mic to be most prominent), high-pass filter, noise gate and Aphex's Aural Exciter and Big Bottom. There is also a choice of voice settings, divided into Tone (Deep Voice, Medium Voice and High Voice) and Strength (Soft, Medium and Strong).

The RØDECaster Pro is primarily intended for speech-based podcasts, a theme and interviews played in from computer or mobile phone. Because of the limited number of line source channels, it would be practical to use an automation program with tracks and segues already scheduled.

Multitrack recording

Since its initial release the RØDECaster Pro has been updated with firmware for multitrack recording. Once loaded, update 1.1.0 is accessed through the Advanced Settings menu of the Hardware display and enables the desk to record up to 14 tracks, including a mono track for each of the mic inputs and a stereo track for each of the USB, mobile phone, Bluetooth and effects pads channels. At the time of writing this was not available for microSD recording but RØDE said it was close to officially launching that option.

In all the RØDECaster Pro is a neat, compact device for a very specific market. The quality of audio and build are above average; the array of features and options certainly makes it good value at £669, with some dealers listing it for at least £100 less than that. A conventional radio desk might give more flexibility but as all-in-one options go, this covers most of what even demanding podcasters and home broadcasters will want to do. **ⓡ**

resolution/VERDICT

PROS   Well laid-out integrated console with a wide array of features at a competitive price.

CONS   Unspecific metering.

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