

Reviews : Microphone

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Rode M1

Live vocal mic

Best known for their studio mics, Rode have launched a new dynamic, live vocal mic, but how does it compare with what's already out there?

by Paul White

Australian manufacturers Rode have made a sizeable impression in the studio world with their high-quality, modestly priced capacitor microphones, all built in their own Sydney factory. They've also launched a few capacitor mics into the live marketplace, though this is their first dedicated dynamic vocal model. Despite its 'me too' looks, the cardioid-pattern M1 has been designed to challenge the more obvious choices in both sound quality and durability, with the latter backed by a lifetime warranty.

A closer look

The M1 features a solid die-cast body, where the dynamic capsule is again built in-house, and it claims a high output, low handling noise and a good resistance to plosive popping — all desirable attributes in a live vocal mic. Its cardioid pattern offers good rear rejection, which bodes well for minimising feedback, and it claims a frequency range of 75Hz to 18kHz. A look at the frequency graph shows a wide presence bump centred at around 8kHz rising to around +5dB or +6dB, accompanied by a gentle low-frequency roll-off starting at around 200Hz to counter the proximity bass boost that always comes with using a cardioid-pattern mic at close range. The -3dB point is around 75Hz, which ties in with the frequency range spec, though there's a slight hump at around 200Hz, which adds some warmth to the lower end of the voice range.

Sensitivity is quoted at -56dB +/- 2dB ref 1V/Pa (1.6mV@94dB) measured at 1kHz, which is in the same ballpark as the other dynamic mics I pulled out for comparison, with the exception of the rather more sensitive Heil Sound PR 22. There's nothing unusual about the format of the M1; it follows the usual 'ball on a stick' layout with a foam-lined metal basket that screws in place to protect and screen the capsule. The grille is finished in non-reflective paint, while the body has a nice dark grey satin finish, and the conventional balanced XLR output has gold-plated pins to prevent corrosion. With an overall size of 171 x 51.5mm diameter, the mic weighs a comfortable 360g and ships in a stylish (but almost totally pointless!) tin can, along with the stand clip and a zip-up vinyl pouch.

Testing, one, two

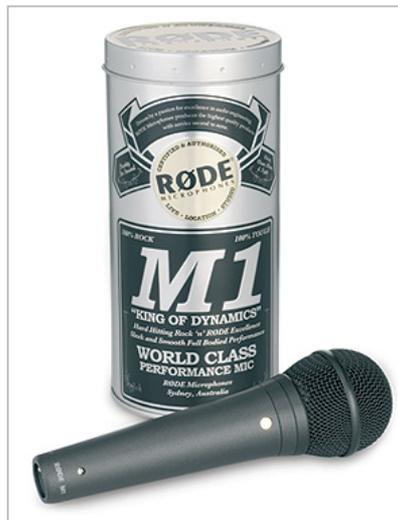
Outwardly, then, the M1 has a very familiar shape and feel, but what does it sound like? To test it, I tried it through a Fohhn PA system I had in for review, as that gives the closest to hi-fi performance I've heard from a portable sound system. I compared the M1 with several other dynamic models including the Heil Sound PR 22 and a Shure SM57 mic I have had in my collection since the 1970s (sadly, I didn't have an SM58 on hand). Sound-wise, the M1 came closer to the Shure SM57, but with a more open, airy sound and a hint more output. Despite the substantial 8kHz hump shown on the frequency response graph, the M1 didn't sound to have an excessively pronounced presence peak, so the overall impression was more of a smooth and detailed studio vocal sound than an in-your-face live rock sound. By contrast, the Heil Sound PR 22 had more output and more overall clarity, presumably due to differences in the tailoring of the frequency response in the presence region.

Saying which is better is less straightforward, as you need to pick a mic that suits your voice. For example, if you always have trouble cutting through, then the Heil Sound PR 22 would be a good choice. But if you have a voice with a bright edge to it anyway, then it can come over as harsh if you use a bright mic, so the M1 would be a better bet in that case, as its presence curve emphasises only the upper part of the spectrum, making it sound more airy than aggressive. With my own voice, I felt the M1 gave me the best overall tonal balance, combining clarity with a touch of low-end support, though when gigging with my band I also really like the way the Heil Sound PR 22 cuts through without sounding too strident. With my voice, Shure mics tend to sound just a hint honky in the mid-range and lacking in high-end airiness, but for most users they get the vocals across pretty well in a real-world situation, particularly for rock music where you need to make yourself heard above a noisy backline. Best, then, is in the ear of the beholder.

I experienced no popping problems with the M1 and its handling noise is at least as good as the other dynamic mics I tend to use, though some noise is audible if you knock the cable while it is hanging from the mic. If you support the cable with your other hand, there's virtually no handling noise at all. It's certainly not a problem in normal use and the M1's feedback rejection is as good as you can expect for this style of microphone where the rear of the mic is extremely insensitive. As it is cardioid rather than hypercardioid, you'll get the best feedback rejection when the stage monitors point directly into the rear of the mic.

Rode worthy?

Given its performance and build quality, I think Rode have priced the M1 about right — it is not an entry-level mic, but roughly comparable in price to the most obvious alternatives. It delivers a surprisingly well-balanced and natural sound, with the sort of airy high end you're more likely to encounter with a capacitor model, but being dynamic it requires no phantom power and will probably be harder to break! As intimated earlier, the mic you choose for yourself should complement your voice type, but the moderate tonal characteristics of the Rode M1 should give good results with the majority of both male and female vocalists, though it probably isn't the best mic for death metal and something more aggressive might work better for the more raucous genres of rock. If you like the idea of studio-quality live vocals, then it's a great little mic, but I really have no idea what you're supposed to do with the tin can it comes in! ■ **PM**



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Rode worthy?**

Rode M1 £119

Rode's M1 is a very natural-sounding alternative to the more obvious choices. It is built to last and has a more open-sounding high end than most dynamic mics.

information

Source Distribution
+44 (0)20 8962 8080
www.sourcedistribution.co.uk
www.rodemic.com

Tech Spec

M1

Dynamic cardioid-pattern vocal mic.
Frequency range: 75Hz to 18kHz.
Output impedance: 320Ω.
Sensitivity: -56dB +/- 2dB ref 1V/Pa (1.6mV@94dB) @ 1kHz.
Dimensions: 51.5 x 171mm.
Weight: 360g.

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