

Audio Technica 3035

Andy Stewart puts this well priced large diaphragm condenser under the microscope.

Your microphones are your ears. They do virtually all the listening for you so it's critical that they be a priority in your studio. These days there are microphones to suit every purpose and budget, so if you're in the market for a mic, you need to work out what your budget is and what the mic's primary function will be.

The new Audio Technica AT3035 is a large-diaphragm condenser microphone priced for those of us on a relatively tight budget. Like most mid-priced condensers, it's designed to be versatile. Audio Technica has built the 3035 to cope with the myriad tasks that are asked of any condenser when it's the only large diaphragm mic in the cupboard.

Having said that, the AT3035 is primarily designed for the purpose of recording vocals. It is a side-address, fixed cardioid pattern mic which certainly looks the part – sporting a quality shock mount that is included in the price. Its fixed polar pattern provides reasonable isolation of the voice you're capturing without bringing the room around it into play too much. So if you're recording at home and either your rooms aren't great or there's traffic outside, a fairly tight cardioid polar pattern is what you need. The AT3035 is also well suited to recording guitar amps and drum kits, which is more often the domain of hardier dynamic mics. Good quality mid-priced condensers like this, which can handle high sound pressure levels are very useful on amps that would otherwise have a 57 shoved in front of them. The 3035 is rugged enough to capture the sound of loud instruments more accurately than any dynamic mic ever will – and survive to tell the tale. This mic is built like a tank; possessing none of the physical shortcomings common among other budget

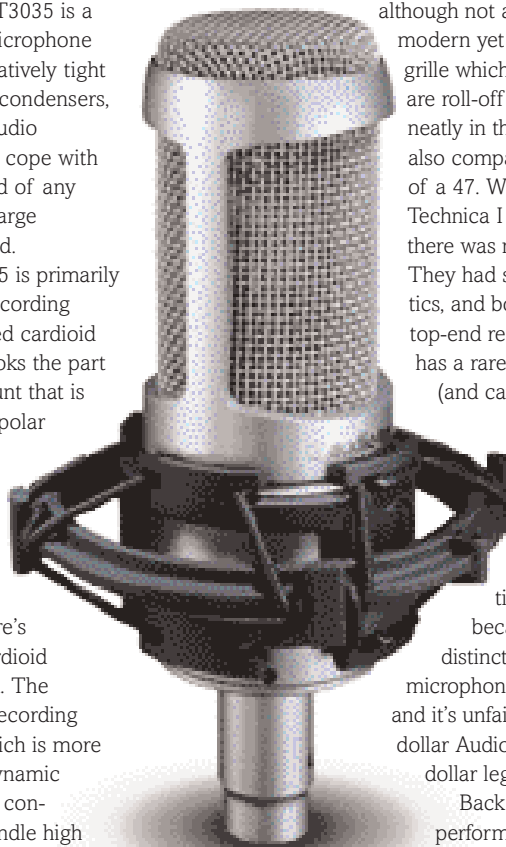
mics. Its sturdy construction and physical refinement belie its low cost – I had figured it to be worth almost twice its retail value.

Student of the Classics

Physically, the AT3035 is reminiscent of a U47 fet, although not as big. This gives the mic a modern yet classical look. It has a curved grille which is flattened at the top and there are roll-off and pad switches embedded neatly in the base. Interestingly, the 3035 is also comparable in some ways to the sound of a 47. While trying out the Audio Technica I placed the two side by side and there was no mistaking their sonic likeness. They had similar bottom-end characteristics, and both possess a fairly understated top-end response. However, the Neumann has a rare gift that the AT3035 does not (and cannot be expected to possess),

given that it's a small fraction of the price. Unfortunately, no sooner had the comparison got underway, than the Neumann decided to pack it in and the test was over. The timing of this was interesting because it highlighted an obvious distinction between new and 'classic' microphones. Old Neumanns are amazing, and it's unfair to compare a six hundred dollar Audio Technica with a six thousand dollar legend, but at least the AT worked!

Back in the real world, the 3035 perform well in front of a variety of sound sources – although not brilliantly. It's more than capable of handling everything from sensitive acoustic guitar to a Fender Twin. It has extremely low self-noise and an SPL rating of 158dB (with the pad switched in) which is heaps unless you're close miking a bomb! However, the trade off with this is that there isn't great top end sensitivity. Despite the spec.



So what makes a great vocal mic?

When people ask me what makes a great vocal mic, I always tell them that a great vocal condenser is one that loves the human voice. When you sing into a fantastic mic you can communicate passion and love, pain and sorrow and the mic is sympathetic to your emotions. Just listen to Jeff Buckley's version of <L>Lilac Wine</L> and hear the relationship

he's having with the mic. What sets great vocal mics apart is their obsession with your voice to the exclusion of all else. They are focused on you like a border collie at a sheep dog trial. Conversely, the vast majority of condensers find it a little harder to concentrate. Personally, if I was looking for a great vocal condenser and I wanted to capture every lip smack and every

subtlety, I wouldn't expect to find one for under a thousand dollars, nor would I expect my new purchase to handle being placed inside a kick drum... Oh, and when I am considering a mic I never look at the frequency graph. Rumour has it they're drawn by Mr Squiggle...

sheet telling me that the mic is sensitive to frequencies between 20 and 20,000 Hz, the reality is that the upper harmonics aren't very apparent so it sounds a little closed. It's not great at capturing the air around things which is something I always look for in a quality large-diaphragm condenser. The midrange of this mic is also a little strong particularly once a vocalist gets going. It gets a little edgy and hard once it's pushed, but this is balanced out to some degree by the bottom end. There is plenty of it down low and this increases nicely with proximity to the mic. Like all condensers of this type, the AT3035 requires a pop-shield if you are intending to sing directly into it at close range.

It seems that the capsule at the heart of this mic has been built to take a hiding, which is good for reliability and versatility. However, to a degree, this precludes the capacity to reproduce sound with ultra high-fidelity. Fragile condensers with very thin capsules are usually the ones most gifted at capturing fine detail and super top-end clarity, but they are much more job-specific than the 3035. What the Audio Technica boasts is "unmatched versatility" (to quote the manufacturer itself). To achieve this the mic has to have a slightly thicker and less sensitive capsule. It is therefore a trade-off between super-clarity and dependability because you can't have it both ways. This is why some of the more 'versatile' condensers are less sensitive to upper

harmonics than very expensive ones.

A Mic You'll Want to Use

For those of us on a budget – namely all of us – it's sometimes difficult to justify paying large sums of money for something that spends much of its time packed away in a drawer. If you're after a classy vocal mic, (the kind you find in a well-equipped commercial studio), the fact is they don't come cheap, so you'd better start saving up. Meanwhile, the AT3035 is well worth a look if you're in need of a versatile condenser to add to your arsenal, or if your 'arsenal' consists of only one or two mics. It is very well constructed and in some ways it's hard to imagine how a product like this can be made so cheaply. In the end the AT3035 seems better built and more generous than most condenser microphones in its price range. Having a well designed and manufactured cradle is a bonus. The AT3035 would make a worthy addition to any home studio.



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Price

- *\$595*
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