

SE Electronics

RNR1 ACTIVE RIBBON

MusicTech
INNOVATION


The developer of some of the most sought-after audio consoles has turned his magic touch to mics. Mike Hillier listens in.

KEY FEATURES

- 2.5-micron aluminium ribbon
- Polar pattern: figure-8
- Frequency response: 20Hz–25kHz
- Max SPL: 135dB
- Bass-cut filter
- Impedance: 200Ω

RNR1 ACTIVE RIBBON

Manufacturer **SE Electronics**

Price **£2,179**

Contact **Sonic Distribution 01582 470260**

Web **www.seelectronics.com**

If there is one person in the recording technology world whose very name inspires confidence, it's Rupert Neve. The recording consoles he designed and built in the 60s and 70s have been used on countless recordings, and despite leaving the company in 1975, preamps, EQs and compressors based on these circuits are still considered to be among the best in the business. New products based on these designs are still manufactured today. Since then, Rupert Neve has helped design microphone preamps, EQs and compressors for a variety of other companies, including his latest venture, Rupert Neve Designs. But what can a man whose name is synonymous with high-quality consoles and outboard gear bring to the world of microphones?

The science bit

The SE RNR1 Active Ribbon is the first result of a collaboration between Rupert Neve and Siwei Zou of SE Electronics. The duo cooked up the idea of pairing Rupert Neve's analogue circuitry expertise with SE's cutting-edge mic designs. The RNR1 puts a custom hand-wound input transformer right next to the ribbon, which buffers the signal and ensures that the amp

circuitry (which uses technology from the RND 5088 console) is able to keep noise to a minimum. Another custom hand-wound transformer is placed after the internal circuitry. The end result of all this is that the RNR1, unlike most other ribbon mics, has a frequency response reaching up to 25kHz – a staggering claim, considering that most ribbons have a steep roll-off anywhere from 7–12kHz. It's not totally smooth all the way up, but SE claims a response of +/-3dB from 20Hz to 16kHz, with a slight dip from 16–25kHz.

The fun part

Our first experience with the RNR1 was at AIR Studios, when SE invited us to a mic shoot-out. We tested the mic against some excellent competition, including a vintage Neumann U67, an AEA R44 and Royer R-122. Among this competition the RNR1 held its own with some ease. We tested it on drums, saxophone, piano and guitar cabinets; on all four you could see times when the RNR1 would be a go-to mic. Placed about six feet in front of the drum kit, the RNR1 had all the depth of the R44, but where the R44 rolls away in the top end, the active circuitry kept the RNR1 sounding smooth all the way up. The U67 had greater presence, but the RNR1 seemed the more natural microphone and was considerably stronger in the low end.

By comparison, the Royer R-122 – another active ribbon – sounded thin, lacking both the depth of the RNR1 and

the R44, and the top end present in the U67 and the RNR1. On saxophones the big three – the RNR1, U67 and R44 – again stood out from the rest. Picking one mic to go with in this circumstance was much harder. The R44 is perfect for vintage jazz styles, while the clarity and smoothness of the RNR1 make it ideal for more natural-sounding sax sessions, and the lift in the top end of the U67 had a more pop-like flavour.

Back in our own studio we again tested the RNR1 on drums (this time against a Coles 4038), as well as on male vocals and acoustic guitar.

Like the R44, the 4038 is a stunning microphone with a dark, vintage character, but the RNR1 gives you all that and more. The low end is just as smooth, but the extra presence gives the RNR1 far greater versatility.

On acoustic guitar we lined up the RNR1 against a vintage Neumann U47. The U47 has been our favourite mic on acoustic guitars ever since we first tried it out, usually paired with a good small-diaphragm condenser such as a Neumann KM184 on the neck. Making a decision between these two mics was really tough. The low end captured the full weight and body of the guitar, and the high frequencies were extremely natural, but in the end the U47 gave us more of what we wanted in the mids. However, we were so impressed with the RNR1 that we opted to use it as the neck mic instead of the usual small-diaphragm condenser.

The hard part

The RNR1 is one of the best microphones we've had the pleasure of putting to test. Its open, natural sound makes it ideal for almost any situation. The fact that it held its own against so many classic studio mics is testament to its quality. This is a microphone we don't want to give back... **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Full-bodied ribbon sound
- A top end that reaches up to 25kHz
- All-round versatility
- Comes with mount and flightcase

WALK ON BY

- Nearly twice the price of other ribbons

VERDICT

The first mic with the Rupert Neve name on it is excellent. We can't wait to try out whatever comes next.



MEASURING UP

The SE and Rupert Neve RNR1 is destined to be a modern classic – certainly the type of mic to aspire to. But when you're looking at spending upwards of £2,000 on a single mic there are several other greats for you to consider. We didn't think the Royer R-122 had the depth or the top end of the RNR1, but at only £1,030 you could get a pair for the same price as a single RNR1. Similarly, the Coles 4038, one of our studio favourites, is only £749.