

Ear Trumpet Labs Mabel

Multi-pattern Capacitor Microphone

There's more to Ear Trumpet Labs' curious creations than the steampunk look — they sound great, too!

PAUL WHITE

If Edward Scissorhands was in the market for a microphone, my guess is that he'd be drawn towards the Ear Trumpet catalogue. Based in the city of Portland, Oregon, this small company put together one of the most visually distinctive ranges of microphones out there. What they describe as 'playfully eclectic design' means mics and shock housings that incorporate parts that look like they've been taken from bicycles, kitchen strainers, brass plumbing fittings and other everyday objects. Despite their visual eccentricity, however, the mics are robust and voiced to appeal to both studio and live-sound users. I understand the company buy in third-party capsules, which they then hand-select and team with bespoke, handmade circuitry and hand-built housings. Current models all seem to have old-school women's names...

Definitely Mabel

Here for review is the Mabel, a multi-pattern capacitor microphone (requiring 48V phantom power) with a tilting head. The microphone body is bookended by brass parts that seem like they've been taken from either water or gas fittings. The body itself is made from one-inch copper tubing, allowing it to fit into most standard mic clips, one of which is included, and the suspension yoke is made from stainless steel. Inside the copper-ringed basket, and perched back-to-back on a Sorbothane shockmount, are two hand-selected,

cardioid-pattern, 26mm back-electret capsules.

A three-position toggle switch sticking out of the top of the basket selects the pattern: cardioid, figure of eight or omni. No mere camera case would be appropriate for this mic; Mabel comes in a foam-lined, bright-red metal box that looks like a tool box.

The FET circuitry is transformerless, presenting a balanced XLR output, and has EMI protection built in. High-quality discrete components have been selected and include metal-film resistors as well as polypropylene and polystyrene capacitors. All the transistors and JFETs are hand-matched and the FETs are individually biased. The circuit includes high-frequency EQ used to voice the capsules, with the aim of delivering smooth-sounding highs. To this end the response is nominally flat up to 14kHz, after which it drops away very

Ear Trumpet Labs Mabel £816

PROS

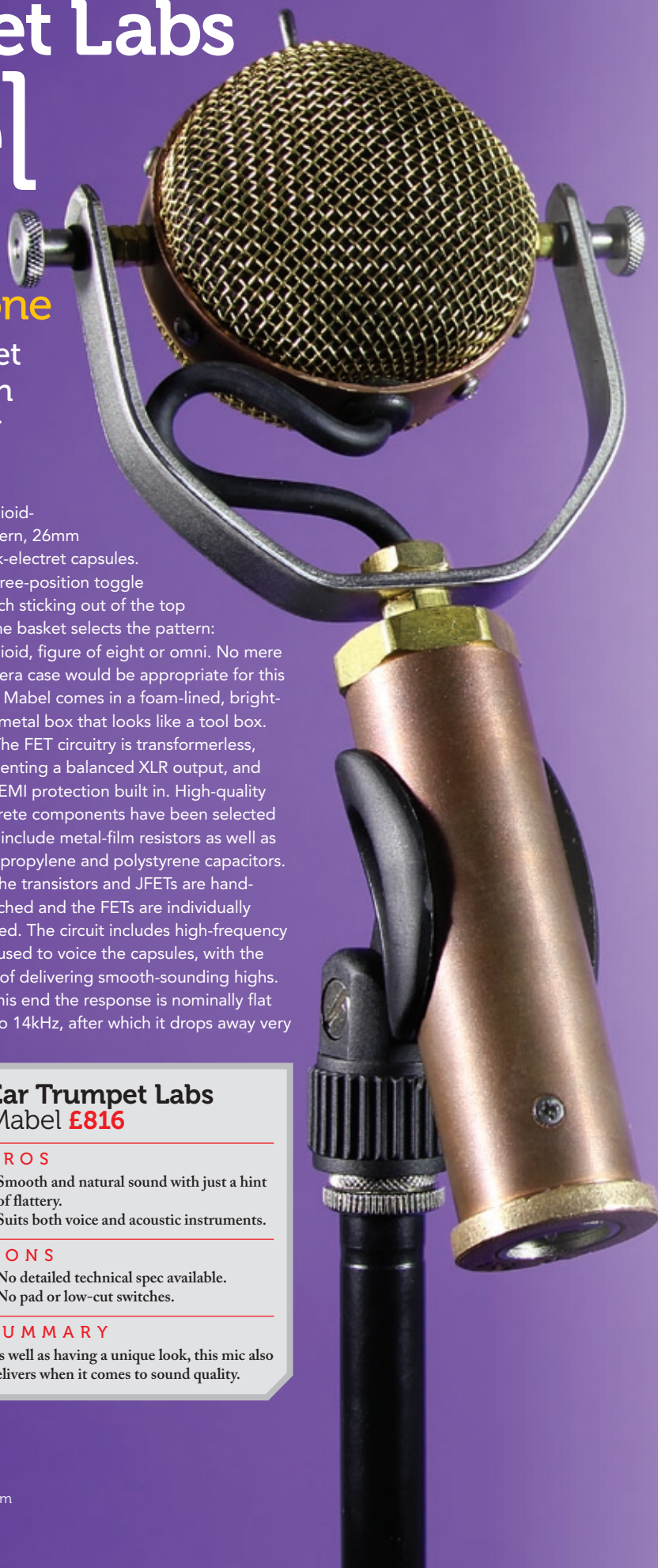
- Smooth and natural sound with just a hint of flattery.
- Suits both voice and acoustic instruments.

CONS

- No detailed technical spec available.
- No pad or low-cut switches.

SUMMARY

As well as having a unique look, this mic also delivers when it comes to sound quality.



Alternatives

If you like retro styling, then **Blue** and **Sontronic** will both scratch that itch for you, though I can't think of any other direct alternative when it comes to repurposing household hardware!

gradually. There's no low-cut switch or pad.

Supplied technical details are a bit on the thin side (I could find no response curves or figures for maximum SPL or EIN on the company's web site, for example), so the best way to evaluate this microphone is by using it and scrutinising the results.

Nice Bit Of Trumpet

I have to admit that I wasn't really sure what to expect from such an off-the-wall design but, as it turned out, I was pleasantly surprised. In cardioid mode, vocals come over as very well balanced and natural-sounding, with the high-end detail present but not over-hyped. There's low-end lift from the proximity effect when you get close, just as you'd expect, but at a normal working distance you wouldn't need much in the way of EQ to arrive at a mix-ready result. I didn't notice any background noise so, for typical studio and live-sound applications where the mic will be used close to the source, I don't anticipate any problems.

In figure-of-eight mode the off-axis rejection is nothing short of spectacular, so if you're in the habit of using figure-of-eight mics to cut down on spill, you'll enjoy working with this one. Omni mode behaves just as you'd expect, and while the highs do vary a little as you move towards 90 degrees off-axis, the overall sound is natural once you acclimatise to this mode's lack of proximity effect. As with most multi-pattern mics, the sound can appear to thin out somewhat as you switch from cardioid pattern to omni.

Switching to acoustic guitar delivered a sound that was extremely close to the way I heard the instrument in the room. As on vocals, the overall impression was encouraging: the highs managed to balance definition and a sense of articulation with a welcome lack of aggression. Like with most large-diaphragm studio mics, there's a little subtle flattery going on, adding weight and projection to the recorded sound, but this is nicely understated so that you never feel you're being tricked by technology.

If you don't need the pad and low-cut switches, there's not much to criticise other than that the tiny engraved legend depicting the polar patterns is almost invisible. There's also no real visual clue as to which side of the mic is the front in cardioid mode (though it turns out that it's the opposite side to the one with the cross-head screw that, presumably, holds in the socket end of the hardware). Also, this is not a cheap microphone. There are many more expensive models, of course, and for a hand-made mic — albeit one using third-party capsules — the price is not unreasonable, especially if you value the visual quirkiness of these designs. Happily, the visuals don't get in the way

of the performance, and judged purely on the recorded results, Mabel is a girl worth getting to know. **///**

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