

# BLUE Bottle

The principle of interchangeable capsules is not a new one but surprisingly few brands pursue the idea with any real vigour these days.

The champion of the cause comes in a reassuring shade of cyan and it's a big bugger.

JON THORNTON

**I F YOU BELIEVE THE ADVERTISING** for a certain French automobile manufacturer, then you'll know that size matters. Which is a good thing if you happen to have been granted temporary custody of BLUE's flagship microphone, the Bottle. From a purely dimensional point of view, the Bottle is impressive even before you open the box, as it ships with its own suitably large, custom built flight-case containing the mic body, power supply, cables and space for a couple of capsules. But for the maximum 'va-va-voom', might I suggest going for the full-on Bottle experience, which entails the addition of a similarly large flight-case containing all eight of the interchangeable capsules currently available.

The microphone body itself is a sizeable metal tube construction, nearly 40cm long and with a girth to match. Despite the company name, this is available in a variety of colours – although fittingly, most are supplied finished in blue. The body contains all the electronics, based around an EF86 pentode valve used in triode mode to provide a discrete Class A output stage. No compromise is said to be made in the choice of components, with custom manufactured devices used where commercially available components aren't up to spec – most notable is the immense output transformer. The build quality and attention to detail shown to every part of the microphone system is nothing short of magnificent.

Having set the mic body up on the sturdiest stand you can find, the 9610 power supply unit is connected using the supplied cable. This supply has a 'soft-start' feature that first applies the heater voltage, and then gradually applies the plate voltage once the cathode is fully heated to prolong the life and performance of the valve. This means that initially powering the mic up takes about three minutes, during which the audio output is muted. Fortunately, the interchangeable capsules can be 'hot-swapped' without powering down – although you have to be careful to mute the microphone when doing so.

The power supply also features a 9-position switch that can vary the capsule's polarisation voltage applied to the capsule in use – subtly, or not subtly, changing its characteristics.

BLUE manufactures a variety of capsules and changing them is an extremely simple operation by way of a push and twist BNC-like connector. Each capsule comes with three thumbscrews around the perimeter of the 'lollipop' shape, which lock the diaphragm in place for transit, and need to be

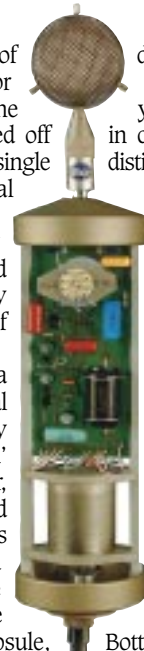
removed before use.

The capsules on offer provide a range of diaphragm sizes, pick-up patterns and single or dual backplate configurations – and each one really does have a unique character. We kicked off with the B0 large diaphragm cardioid with a single back plate. On female vocals, the initial impression was of a slightly warming sound, although quite prone to popping and requiring careful placement of the vocalist and pop shield when set close. The capsule lent a very immediate sound to the vocal – with plenty of 'air' and detail without too much sibilance.

Switching to the B6 capsule, which is again a large diaphragm cardioid, but this time with a dual back plate, and the sound was instantly more aggressive. A much more 'modern' sound, this capsule is tuned much higher, which gives a good 'cut' to the high end of a vocal. In use, this also accentuates sibilance, but on the plus side seemed less susceptible to popping than the B0. The final choice of large diaphragm cardioids is the B7 capsule, which seems to unabashedly emulate the sound of classic valve condensers. While not having the ultimate presence of the other two capsules, the B7 offers a gentler, warmer tone to most instruments and voices, yet without sacrificing anything in the detail of the sound.

In keeping with BLUE's philosophy that the response and sound of their capsules shouldn't be dictated by scientific measurement, but rather by their application – the B2 is a large diaphragm capsule with a fig-8 response. BLUE describes this as the 'vintage capsule', and its sound is very reminiscent of a ribbon. It demonstrates good transient response, but with a noticeable high frequency roll-off and an immense presence boost in the mid-range. On vocals, you really need to work this mic close, as at a distance it sounds far too 'roomy'. Get close enough though, and although it lacks the absolute definition of the B0 capsule, it does a good job of revealing subtle nuances in a voice.

Omni directional patterns are provided by two capsules. The B5 is the larger diaphragm omni, and to my ears sounds the most coloured of the capsules. Used to close mic an acoustic guitar it proved very pleasing on some instruments and playing styles, but too coloured on others, especially in the mid-range. The B4 capsule is a small diaphragm omni mounted in a Perspex sphere – but unfortunately I wasn't able to audition this one.



I could go on about the small and mid-sized diaphragm cardioid capsules available, but I'd probably still be going in the next issue. What you need to understand is that all of the capsules in conjunction with the Bottle have a fantastically distinctive sound – and all of them have a presence, definition and clarity that is hard to put into words. By any measure, the Bottle is a stunning microphone – aesthetically, sonically and technically.

Having the range of characteristics offered by the entire capsule range is a great tool in the studio, but it comes at a price – UK£4250 to be precise, and that's just for the Bottle, PSU and one capsule. Thereafter, each additional capsule costs between £775 and £945. There's an argument here that suggests that a similar amount of money could purchase a range of microphones with differing characteristics. Moreover, you could use them all simultaneously – something that simply isn't possible with the Bottle. But that's missing the point, as none of them would actually be the Bottle. Does size matter? You betcha... ■



**PROS** Build quality; design; fantastic sonic quality; varied and useful range of capsule options

**CONS** Price; may be a little too large for some situations; possibly not as flexible as a range of separate microphones

**EXTRAS** The Bottle has a wide variety of capsule types and configurations.

- B0: cardioid large diaphragm single backplate
- B1: cardioid small diaphragm
- B2: figure of eight large diaphragm
- B3: cardioid mid-sized diaphragm
- B4: perspex sphere pressure omni small diaphragm
- B5: pressure omni large diaphragm
- B6: cardioid large diaphragm dual backplate
- B7: cardioid large diaphragm single backplate

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