

BLUE Ball

Told to expect a pair of BLUE Balls in the post, JON THORNTON suspects that somebody's having a laugh at his expense. They are billed as the world's first Phantom-powered dynamic mics, and they are blue and they are, well, round.

WHILE BLUE HAS EARNED a reputation for delivering very different looking microphones, I haven't yet encountered a microphone that elicits such a variety of response from people. The Ball is almost completely spherical, and finished in blue (of course) ABS plastic. A 3/8-inch thread allows it to be mounted on a microphone stand, and this thread swivels slightly to aid positioning. Resisting the urge to head immediately for the first pub you can find with a bowling green, other immediate impressions are of some rather impressively styled ports on the front hemisphere, the BLUE logo, and a red LED that sits slightly proud of the casing. This, of course, indicates that the Ball is in receipt of Phantom power – but given that this is a dynamic microphone, what's that all about?

The answer, according to BLUE, is that this addresses an endemic problem with dynamic mics, in that their output impedance varies according to frequency, resulting in some colouration of the sound. Housed in the microphone body is a specially designed active balancing circuit, that attempts to present a constant 50ohm output impedance across the mic's audible frequency range, and it is this that requires Phantom power to operate. This sounds very plausible in theory – but how does it work in practice?

The Ball's quoted frequency response is 35Hz-16kHz, but with no deviation figures offered in the specification for this response, the ears are the final judge. Initial impressions are that the response is slightly lumpy, although not unpleasantly so. A definite dip in the mid range is audible, and the high frequency shows a rising response followed by quite a

pronounced roll-off above 10kHz. Bass response seems quite even and well extended though, which gives a definite authority to the sound.

The first task in the studio was to assist in the

applications and placements that you may never have considered before. So whether it's positioned perilously close to drum sticks as a snare top mic, or thrown on the damping inside the kick, or wedged inside the back of a guitar cabinet, or nestled right in the top corner of the live room as an ambient mic, the Ball is willing and able. Admittedly, half the time you revert to something a little more conventional, but you can end up with some very useable sounds.

That's not to say that this isn't something we can and should be doing with any microphone, but the Ball goes some way to encourage experimentation.

The accompanying product literature, tongue-in-cheek as it may be, seems to echo this sentiment (optimum inflation pressure is included in the tech specs).

In short, the Ball is a nice, open sounding dynamic microphone, well suited to a variety of applications. It also looks funky, is a great talking point, and helps put the fun back into a recording session. ■



production of an authentic 1970s funk drum sound. Positioned as a very close overhead pair, the Balls gave a tremendously smooth and full sound after the drummer had fallen of his drum stool with mirth (*Presumably you took the opportunity to chuck one at him? Ed*). Not the last word in high frequency detail, admittedly, but they worked well in the context of the piece. Imagine a slightly less detailed ribbon microphone, and you nearly have it.

Polar pattern is cardioid, and while the case design clearly helps in achieving impressive off-axis rejection at high frequencies, the Ball did tend towards an omni response at quite high frequencies. So far then, it's a pleasant enough sounding microphone in an unconventional package – but that's not quite the end of the story.

Perhaps it's the vaguely Fisher-Price, 'tested to destruction by toddlers' looks – but the Ball positively invites you to be daring with it, to give it a go in

PROS Nice open sound – no doubt helped by the active circuitry; looks and construction; puts some fun back into recording; affordability.

CONS Love or hate looks; swivelmount makes placement tricky sometimes; may sound a little too 'restrained' for some applications.

Contact

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