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Royer SF-24V Stereo Tube Ribbon Mic Review

By Kevin Becka

Royer microphones are favored worldwide among tracking and front-of-house engineers who are ribbon enthusiasts. The company's latest release, the SF-24V, combines the best of Royer's body, mount and electronic designs, which takes this newbie up a notch. The SF-24V's ribbon elements and measured frequency response are identical to the phantom-powered SF-24 stereo ribbon mic, its closely named predecessor. The difference comes in the SF-24V's twin tube circuits, which share their DNA with Royer's R-122V mono tube mic.

The tube advantage in this application goes well beyond the "warmth" factor, instead acting to forgive the sins of phantom power. Simply put, headroom and transient response (aka, audio quality) can be affected in an active ribbon if phantom power is inadequate from the source or weakened due to cable loss or length. This is not a factor in the SF-24V, thanks to the high source voltage supplied to the ribbons and current-regulated heater supplies that automatically compensate for variations in the length of the cable between the mic and the power supply.

Fun, Fun, Fun

I first used the SF-24V with a handheld recorder I was also reviewing. It had built-in mics, as well as XLR inputs that I decided to test using the SF-24V. I positioned the mic 40 feet back from the stage in a 6,000-square-foot live room with a four-piece band onstage. The P.A. was an exemplary L-Acoustics' KUDO line array, making the band sound big and "live" in the room. When I took the recording back to my office and listened through a pair of Focal CMS 65s, my jaw dropped from hearing how closely my front-of-the-stage experience resembled the playbacks. The mic captured consistent high-end detail, a lush bottom end and a solid, punchy midrange.

Placed over a studio drum kit, the SF-24V offered a clear stereo image of the toms and cymbals with a nice, smooth top end. It also sounded spectacular on acoustic guitar. At the corner of a Leslie cabinet, it exhibited plenty of nice B3 Doppler effect in the mix that could be easily widened or narrowed by adjusting the panning. The results were also good on a Fender Supersonic guitar amp: Decisive transients, no hint of breakup and a nice beefy midrange made the guitar shine in the mix.

In all applications, the Royer mount deserves high praise. The same as in the SF-24, using the mic in X/Y or mid/side applications is a breeze. My only gripe is that Royer dropped the Upper/Lower (ribbon) designation on the outputs as in the past and now uses Ch.1/Ch.2. This increases the L/R "mystery" factor during chaotic session setups.

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I'm a fan of the SF-24 - which I use often - and this mic's ease of placement in a variety of situations is unequalled. The SF-24V shares this ability and adds that extra something you get from a well-designed tube circuit.

The fun factor is set to high on the SF-24V, urging you to try it in a wide variety of applications just to see what you get. In a live room with a band, the mic captured distance detail like a champ. The top is open, with musical response from top to bottom. Cymbals, drum transients, guitars, vocals and more come through with that gut feeling like you're in the room. Up close on amps, acoustic guitars and drums, it can stand up to high SPLs and delivers tight, crisp transients with plenty of punch. To hear audio examples, visit mixonline.com/Online_Extras_Main_page.

The SF-24V ships in a beautiful cherry box that sits inside a sturdy, partitioned aluminum case with power supply, mount and cables - but at \$6,195, this mic may discourage the faint of heart. If you want the best, then, unfortunately, you've got to be prepared for sticker shock. However, once you hear the SF-24V, the auditory experience will justify the cost.

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