

Prodipe STC3D

Multi-pattern Studio Microphone

This versatile large-diaphragm condenser offers good performance at a very reasonable price.

Paul White

Prodipe (the professional audio division of France-based IPE Music) have taken advantage of low-cost Chinese manufacturing to produce a new range of affordable studio microphones. A familiar story, perhaps, but there's an individual twist. IPE music have top French Producer Ludovic Lanen on their side — quite literally, in fact, as they have his name on the side of their microphone! Ludovic Lanen has worked with many top French vocal artists and he seems confident enough in this microphone to lend his name to it. He cites smoothness and neutrality as the mic's key strengths and claims it is one of the best he has for everyday use. There's no in-depth information available as to where the microphone was designed or where the quality control takes place, but with

SOUND ON SOUND

Prodipe STC3D £130

pros

- Gently flattering but smooth sound.
- Pad and filter switches.
- Three patterns: omni, cardioid and figure-of-eight.
- Includes case and rugged shockmount.

cons

- There are no obvious cons at this price.

summary

It's in a fiercely competitive market, but the Prodipe STC3D performs well given its price range and is capable of excellent results.

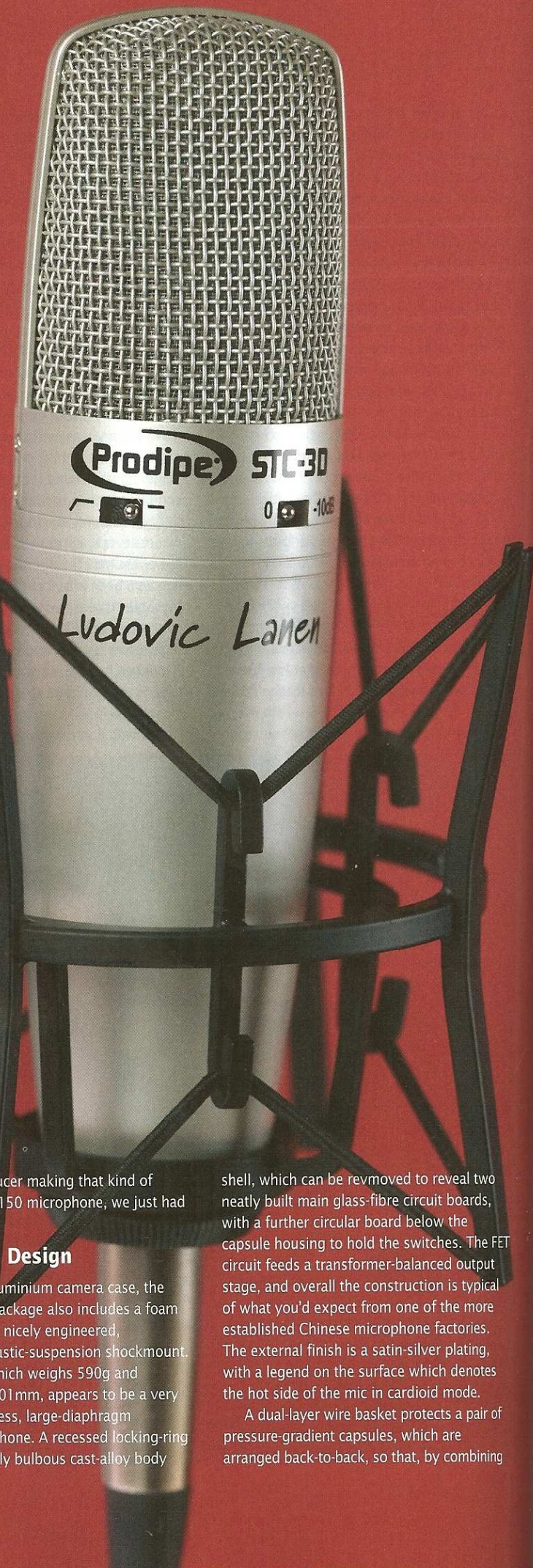
a big name producer making that kind of claim for a sub-£150 microphone, we just had to give it a try.

Design

Supplied in an aluminium camera case, the Prodipe STC3D package also includes a foam windshield and a nicely engineered, metal-framed, elastic-suspension shockmount. The mic itself, which weighs 590g and measures 54 x 201mm, appears to be a very typical side-address, large-diaphragm capacitor microphone. A recessed locking-ring secures the slightly bulbous cast-alloy body

shell, which can be removed to reveal two neatly built main glass-fibre circuit boards, with a further circular board below the capsule housing to hold the switches. The FET circuit feeds a transformer-balanced output stage, and overall the construction is typical of what you'd expect from one of the more established Chinese microphone factories. The external finish is a satin-silver plating, with a legend on the surface which denotes the hot side of the mic in cardioid mode.

A dual-layer wire basket protects a pair of pressure-gradient capsules, which are arranged back-to-back, so that, by combining



them in different ways, the mic pattern can be switched to omni, cardioid or figure-of-eight. There's no technical detail available for the capsules, but they look to be just over one inch in diameter and feature the usual gold-on-Mylar diaphragms. The frequency-response plots show that, in cardioid mode, the response is generally flat from 20Hz to 20kHz, with a modest presence lift up at around 12kHz. In figure-of-eight mode, the presence peak is much broader, and centred around 5kHz, while in omni mode the presence hump is back up above 10kHz. All three patterns show a very subtle mid-range dip, and there's a switchable low-cut filter that, according to the frequency plot, appears to kick in at around 120Hz, with a slope in the order of 12dB per octave. This is operated by a horizontal, recessed toggle switch on the side of the mic. A further toggle switch brings in a 10dB pad for use with loud sound sources.

The sensitivity of the mic is from -31dB to -35dB \pm 2dB (0dB=1V/Pa at 1kHz), depending on which pattern is selected. Similarly, the self-noise varies from 14 to 16dBA, according to pattern. These figures are not untypical for this style of microphone, which tends to be optimised for close to middle distance working. The maximum SPL is 130dB or 140dB with the pad switched in (at 1kHz 1% THD) — which, again, is a very typical figure, and means that the mic won't be overloaded if used above percussion instruments. As the STC3D is a true capacitor microphone, it requires 48V phantom power.

Smooth & Versatile

Outwardly, then, this microphone is tidy and solidly built, but unremarkable (many other brands are built and styled in a similar way). What really matters, of course, is how it performs in the studio. The STC3D turned in a very respectable performance for me, both on voice and acoustic guitar, with no perceptible noise in typical close-miking setups. I compared the vocal sound in cardioid mode with that of several other well-known dual-diaphragm mics that have similar capsule diameters, and the results were not dissimilar. The STC3D comes across as smooth but with just a hint of a helping hand in the 'air' region above 8kHz. It also has a nice, supportive warmth in the lower registers of the male voice. Switching in the filter cleans up the low end considerably without having too much of a subjective effect on vocal sounds, though deep male voices might suffer slightly (in which case using no filter and compensating with external EQ may prove a better option).

Alternatives

There are now plenty of large-diaphragm condenser microphones in this price range — and too many to list. However, you might want to include manufacturers such as SE Electronics, MXL and Rode in your shortlist. As always, different mics work better for different voices, so if you are looking predominantly for a mic for your own vocals it is worth trying a few different models before you buy.

Most mics with inbuilt filters deliver similar results and the setting is a good compromise between reducing rumble and affecting the vocal sound.

As an acoustic guitar mic, the STC3D delivers a full-bodied sound but with good clarity, and although this type of mic wouldn't be my first choice for recording acoustic instruments (I tend to reach for a small-diaphragm cardioid or omni for this application) it works perfectly well, which will be handy for anyone who needs to use the same mic for many different jobs. The subjective tonality also holds up well between the three pattern modes, and the figure-of-eight mode offers excellent rejection to sounds 90 degrees off axis. This is a useful pattern to have available when trying to separate sounds, as you can often arrange to aim the dead side of the mic at the sound you're trying to reject, but it also works well as a room ambience mic at a distance from the source; if you aim the dead side of the mic towards the instrument, the mic picks up mainly reflected sound.

Conclusion

At under £150, the Prodipt STC3D is very reasonably priced for a well-made, Chinese-built, multi-pattern microphone. Though you can't expect to get a world-class output transformer in a mic at this price point, the STC3D still turns in a good performance, and should suit a lot of vocal styles, as it has a gently flattering character, rather than an obviously hyped sound. Naturally, it isn't without competition, and if the mic is mainly for your own use it is always wisest to try out a few models in your price range and see what suits your voice best. However, there's nothing really to fault at the price, and having switchable patterns makes the STC3D very versatile. **EOS**

information

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