

Vanguard Audio Labs V4

JON THORNTON enjoys the flavour of a pinot-tinted oblation from Southern California

The V4 has an evolutionary backstory that is possibly the exact opposite of most. Whilst I can think of a number of stereo microphones that have developed out of the capsules and electronics of the original mono versions (AKG's C24 springs to mind) — I'm not sure if I can recall an example of a stereo design giving rise to a mono version. But that's exactly what's happened here. The V4 is essentially a single channel version of the company's V44S stereo microphone, featuring the same capsule and near identical electronics. It comes as a result of requests from V44S users for a more compact, mono version of the stereo microphone, but with the same overall tonality.

Losing one capsule assembly shaves some 55mm from the overall length — making the V4 quite a compact affair. A 34mm edge terminated dual diaphragm capsule assembly is clearly visible behind an open mesh polished nickel head grille, which contrasts nicely with the signature 'pinot' gloss finish of the microphone body. It's a nod to classic styling cues — and that nod continues with the internals. A discrete FET design with a transformerless output, a peek inside shows two very tidy looking circuit boards populated with high quality components. But whilst things look fairly 'classic' both on the surface and under the hood, the V4 isn't aiming to ape the sound of a particular classic microphone.

Vanguard say that the capsule, power and signal paths are identical to those in the V44S — with one exception. Additional room in the mic body has meant that a high pass filter (120 Hz) and a -10dB pad have been added to the mix via a three-position toggle switch at the rear of the microphone. It's a slightly odd design though, as it forces you to choose either the pad or the filter — you can't have both simultaneously. Another 3 position toggle switch at the front of the mic selects polar pattern.



Substantial shockmount

The mic itself comes with a protective wooden box, and ships with a supplied shockmount — all of which fits in a compact hard case. The shockmount is worthy of special mention in its own right. It's a substantial affair that screws into the thread on the microphone base. An inner 'C' shaped construction sits suspended by tough looking elastic rings within a similarly shaped outer ring — the benefit being that the front of the microphone is completely unobstructed. And it feels like it's hewn from girders — and I mean that in a good way! This is all the more compelling when taking into account the price point for the microphone. At \$399 or £460 inc. VAT, it's taking aim squarely at the middle of a fairly crowded sector, but there's no sense from either the mic itself or the supplied accessories that it's been

built to a price.

It's actually quite refreshing these days to review a microphone that doesn't claim a single point of reference / inspiration, but it does beg the question of what to compare it to. I pitched it against both an AKG C414 XLS and a Warm Audio WA47-jr — both transformerless, multi-pattern, large diaphragm designs that sit either side of the V4's price point. Initial impressions on voice (cardioid) pattern is of a tonality that errs slightly towards brightness, but with quite a focussed, tight low end that keeps things sounding solid and crisp rather than glassy or hard. The 414 in comparison sounds a little more revealing, especially in the low mid-range — but this does tend to be more honest sounding than flattering. The 47-jr sits between the two in my view — there's a similar sense of a rounded low end, but a slightly harder edge to mid and high frequencies. Off axis response of all three mics is reasonably smooth — and the V4 pretty much matches the 414 here in terms of evenness. Switching to

sung male vocals only reinforces those initial impressions of tonality — it's very much dependent on the voice of course, but the V4 is probably the most flattering, whilst staying reasonably neutral — particularly when moving closer to the microphone. The 414 delivers its signature 'warts and all' sound, but sounds a touch more overblown once you move into proximity effect.

The V4 earns its keep

I'm of the view that a mic like this needs to earn its keep — it needs to be as much of a general-purpose workhorse as it does a decent vocal microphone choice. So with V4 in hand, I went scouting around the studio complex to give it a try on whatever I found happening in sessions. Which happened to be drums (despite hoping for something a little more exotic). One thing that struck me immediately here is just how good the V4 sounds at different working distances. Often a mic in this class can sound very compelling worked close, but a little underwhelming when put further back in a space — and that's not the case here. Close miked on a floor tom there's a real sense of cohesion to the low-mids — helped by engaging the filter to tidy up the very low end. But great transient detail too — and enough rejection in cardioid pattern to ensure not too much in the way of bleed. Moving the V4 to a direct overhead position lost a little of the LF presence, but still maintained a good deal of focus, impact and HF detail — and even when moved further away and forward of the kit, those impressions remain.

And it's that ability, in my opinion, that makes any microphone a true workhorse. The V4 certainly has its own character — it's a different sound to both comparators — a little softer than the 47-jr and a little less glassy than the 414. But it applies that character flexibly and consistently — and if you like it, it could easily become a bit of a 'go-to' in the mic locker. **i**

resolution/VERDICT

PROS High quality construction and presentation — especially at this price point; bright yet warm voicing; works well close-up and at a distance.

CONS Pad or filter — not both; not as brutally honest in delivery as some choices if that matters.

www.vanguardaudiolabs.com