



TEST

SE ELECTRONICS ICIS

SE ELECTRONICS Iciss

Why pay for extra pickup patterns when most of the time you need only cardioid? Closely related to the SE5600a, the Iciss has a redesigned body and fixed cardioid capsule. **Huw Price** spots the difference.

ICIS
 Manufacturer
SE Electronics
 Price **£349**
 Contact **01525 840400**
www.sonic-distribution.com

Like all of SE's current range of microphones, the Iciss looks impressive. Although not as identifiably retro as some of the company's Neumann- and AKG-inspired products, the Iciss recalls the iconic RCA 77 microphone, with its rounded capsule housing. As we have come to expect from recent SE microphones, the Iciss' build quality is very high. Once again, we see the special matte grey paint and the SE badge, plus the superb eight-pin connector.

Despite the cosmetic differences, the Iciss and the 5600a are electronically very similar. Both have 1.07-inch capsules, but the Iciss' gold diaphragm is edge connected rather than centre-tapped

over-hyped. This is an encouraging sign that Chinese microphone manufacturers are improving – and maybe gaining in confidence.

Vocal recording revealed a larger-than-life sound with a physical quality that only decent valve mics seem to pull off. There's plenty of clearly etched definition in the S and T frequency range, which proved excellent for capturing acoustic guitar. Off-axis response is not as smooth as the 5600a because the top end rolls off more quickly and the Iciss' rear rejection isn't quite as strong. Sadly, we encountered problems when we tried recording electric guitar with the Iciss. Although the gargantuan suspension mount is attractive and effective, it detracts



is accurate, we'd have to blame the preamps – but come on, SE, how difficult is it to fit a 10dB pad on a £350 mic? The distributors did point out that the Iciss is primarily intended for vocals rather than instruments, but if you are planning to buy only one microphone, you might need more versatility than that.

For the record

SE Electronics claims that the Iciss is designed to “capture the warmest, most detailed vocal take imaginable”. While that might be overstating things, the Iciss absolutely fulfils its brief. However, the 5600a sounds fairly similar and the additional pickup patterns are worth having if you can find the extra £50. **mtm**

The Iciss did a fantastic job of capturing the timbre and subtlety of our guitar and amplifier combination.

and it has a fixed cardioid response. Inside, the printed circuit board construction is neat and there's a chunky output transformer. An SE-branded ECC83 valve sits on a flimsy-looking shelf halfway up the body, so great care should be taken when you need to change valves.

Suspension disbelief

The trademark SE Electronics lightshow accompanies switch-on. Compared directly with the SE 5600a, the differences are fairly slight: the Iciss sounding more natural, with smoother, less coloured low-mids and a tighter, more focused bottom end. The high end also sounds cleaner and clearer.

Although the capsule design and physical differences in the capsule housing might explain these differences, they might simply be attributable to variations between individual valves or diaphragms. The high-frequency response is impressive: although there's a lift above 10kHz, it doesn't sound

from the Iciss' practicality. There's no way you can squeeze it into a tight spot or place the capsule as close to the speaker cloth as you might like, so purchasing an alternative mount might prove necessary. Taking advantage of SE's Free Loan Scheme (see the SE website for details) will enable you to check whether these kinds of issues might affect you.

Down to detail

The Iciss is extremely sensitive and it did a fantastic job of capturing the timbre and subtlety of our guitar and amplifier combination. The problems started when we tried to crank the 10-watt Vox amplifier up a bit. Our first preamp (a Drawmer 1960) couldn't cope with the output level, and since neither the Iciss nor the preamp has an attenuation pad, we tried a Telefunken V72. Although we were able to attenuate the volume sufficiently to record below the digital maximum on our hard disk, the sound had a fizzy distortion. Assuming SE's quoted SPL of 130dB

METHOD SPOT

Falling for you...

The suspension mount's tubular centrepiece slips securely over the microphone's body and the base screws on to clasp it. Despite its weight, you can hang the Iciss any way you like, safe in the knowledge that it won't take a tumble.

SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Frequency response: 20Hz–20kHz
- Sensitivity: 20mV/Pa – 34±1dB (0dB=1V/Pa 1,000Hz)
- Polar pattern: cardioid
- Impedance: <=200Ω
- Max SPL for 0.5% THD@1,000Hz: 130dB

WHY BUY

- Fabulous build quality
- Low noise floor
- Genuinely smooth tone
- Optimised for vocals

WALK ON BY

- No pad or bass rolloff
- Attractive but rather awkward suspension mount
- Off-axis treble loss

VERDICT

One of the most pleasing modern valve microphones we have tried and easily SE Electronics' sweetest-sounding cardioid mic so far.

