


Telefunken

AR-51

The AR-51 is a nine-pattern valve mic that Telefunken has added to its more affordable R-F-T series. **Huw Price** tests its metal.

AR-51

Manufacturer **Telefunken**

Price **£1,662**

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To make this an affordable microphone, Telefunken has used the metalwork from an Alctron HST-11A and fitted significantly superior components. The preamp circuitry of the company's C12 and ELA M 251 has been re-created on a printed circuit board (PCB) rather than wiring the components point-to-point in true vintage style. But what a PCB it is!

Rather than the usual thin strips of copper, the traces are ultra-thick and silvery, so it's obvious from the start that this is a quality item. We know from our own modding experiences that the HST-11A's stock 12AX7 valve is best substituted for a lower-gain one (this provides more clean headroom; the usual choice is a C12/M 251-spec 6072A), but Telefunken has opted for an ECC81. This is a new old-stock valve, apparently of Mullard manufacture.

Off-and-on shore

'Off-shore' is the phrase that many US companies use rather than 'Chinese'. In this case it applies to some of the AR-51's body components. No one should have any concerns about the metalwork and we think the charcoal powder coating, the engraving and the

Key Features

- Dual-sided, gold-sputtered membrane
- Frequency range: 20Hz–20kHz
- Polar patterns: omni, cardioid, figure-8 plus 6 intermediate stages
- Impedance: 200 ohms
- SPL: 138dB

black chrome look fantastic. The outer tube is steel rather than brass and it's machined in the US.

The Chinese capsule might raise some eyebrows, particularly when competitors such as Peluso assemble their own in the US. However, Telefunken assures us that all of its capsules pass

/// **A genuine all-rounder** with plenty of detail and an extremely **likeable character** ///

Measuring Up

The Peluso P12 (£999) is another similarly upgraded microphone based on the Alctron HST-11A. However, the AR-51 is slightly more up-front and present while the Peluso sounds airier, deeper, softer and more 'vintage'. Ultimately, choosing between them would be a matter of personal taste. Another model you might consider is the Advanced Audio CM-12 (\$695). This is another upgraded HST-11A with a Peluso CEK-12 capsule, a BV11 output transformer, a 6072a valve and a 1.5mF coupling capacitor to lower the bass to 10Hz.

rigorous quality-control testing. Unlike the edge-terminated capsule you might have expected to find in a mic so closely modelled on the ELA M 251, the AR-51 has a centre-terminated capsule that looks more like a Neumann derivative.

The other 'off-shore' part is the German-made Haufe output transformer; it's identical to the one used in Telefunken's top-of-the-range C-12 and ELA M 251 E replicas. Inside the AR-51's metal flightcase you'll find a wood box, a PSU and a generic suspension mount. A generous 7.6 metres of Gotham Audio cable is also supplied. It's well-regarded sonically, but displays an annoying tendency to twist unless handled carefully.

On the floor

It's immediately noticeable that the AR-51's noise floor is very low by valve-mic standards. This suggests that

Telefunken's quality-control department is certainly diligent about valve selection. The AR-51 has an enjoyably smooth sound through the midrange and plenty of detail in the top end. It falls somewhat short of the glistening, almost magical treble of the Telefunken ELA M2 50F we reviewed in Issue 57, but so does every other microphone we've tested thus far.

Making A/B comparisons with other similarly priced and spec'd valve mics suggests that the AR-51 has a preset bass roll-off. This isn't necessarily a bad thing – especially if you need to close-mic vocals, guitars or any other instrument – because you can do so without the sound becoming boomy. However, this should be a consideration if you're looking for a large-capsule valve condenser to record instruments with lots of low-frequency content.

Pick it up

Output levels and tone quality are remarkably consistent across all nine pattern settings. Off-axis, cardioid displays only slight bass roll-off, while omni mode remains consistent all around. This is quite impressive for a large-capsule condenser, with which you might expect a bit more high-frequency attenuation at the sides.

Our tests showed the AR-51 to be a genuine all-rounder with plenty of detail, no obvious frequency colourations and an extremely likeable character. As such it should please recordists who appreciate the sonic characteristics of both vintage and modern valve microphones. **MTM**

MTM Verdict

WHY BUY

- + Bright, detailed sound
- + Low noise
- + Manageable proximity effect

WALK ON BY

- Cable tends to twist up
- Preset bass roll-off

Another very high-quality microphone that combines Chinese metalwork with US electronics and engineering expertise.

