

AKG Perception mics | from £119

Designed in Vienna, manufactured in China and sold in the UK. **Trevor Curwen** offers up his own Perception of AKG's globetrotting budget mics

WHAT IS IT?

AKG's budget mic range – designed in Austria, manufactured in Asia

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Good build quality
- 2 High SPL handling
- 3 Multi-pattern capability in the Perception 420

PRICING

Perception 420
£279
Perception 120
£119
Perception 170
£119

AKG mics have always been part of the furniture in the best professional studios but that Austrian quality doesn't

come cheap and to own a classic workhorse like a C414 is likely to be beyond the budget of all but the most well-heeled home recordist or project studio owner. The less expensive alternatives tend to be mics made in the far East and there are shed loads of

those available these days including, as it happens, a range from AKG. Fully aware of the market demand, the company have come up with their own budget Perception range – designed and engineered in Vienna just like the top of the range mics but manufactured in China to keep the costs down.

AKG has introduced four new Perception models – the P120, P170, P220 and P420, each with different

skills and prices. All are condensers working from 48v phantom power and have rugged precision-tooled zinc/aluminium alloy bodies with dent-resistant grille screens. All also feature a switchable 20dB attenuation pad. However, while the three mics have certain features in common, they are each designed for different tasks.

The Perception 420 is the most upmarket of the three, coming in a nice aluminium carry case with a spider-type shock mount. It may also be the most versatile of the bunch in that it has a back to back one inch dual diaphragm allowing three selectable polar patterns – cardioid, omnidirectional and figure of eight – as well as a switchable low-cut filter. AKG see this large diaphragm side-entry mic as being ideally suited for ensemble recording, grand piano, woodwind and brass instruments as well as drums and percussion instruments.

The same size as the 420 and similarly endowed, with a switchable low-cut filter, the Perception 120 is a back electret condenser that comes in a cardboard box with a standard mounting and doesn't look quite as flash as the silver grilled 420 – the metallic blue of its body extending over the whole grille. What you get here is a single 2/3-inch diaphragm and cardioid pattern only microphone that AKG describe as a general-purpose recording microphone.

The Perception 170, again in a cardboard box with a standard mounting, is a thinline, small diaphragm condenser, somewhat in the vein of AKG's C451. AKG say it can handle up to 155dB and see the mic as being equally at home on stage as in the studio.

Mic check

The first thing anyone would note about the set (apart from that grey-blue metallic finish, of course), is that they are superbly engineered and finished to a high standard – AKG apparently applying rigorous quality control in the Chinese construction facility. The Perception 420 frequency response plot in cardioid mode shows a fairly flat response with a mild rise from 2kHz upwards. This is borne out by the clear and fairly neutral sound achieved, making it suitable for recording a variety of instruments with accuracy and top end detail, without adding any particular 'character'. It is well suited to solo voice recording when set to cardioid and the omni pattern lends itself to ensemble vocal recording with a group of singers circled around the mic.



In fact, with the multi-pattern capability allowing a range of stereo miking applications and ambient recording, the 420 is one very useful mic to have in your cupboard.

The 120's obvious use has to be for vocals and it does the job just fine. With a smaller diaphragm and back-electret rather than true condenser operation, the sound is different from the 420 – with slightly more emphasis in the upper mid-range although it's still pretty neutral and handy for acoustic guitar, hand-held percussion et al.

The 170, with the pad engaged, can handle SPLs of up to 155dB, so can be snuck in pretty close to loud sound sources without fear. It is ideal as a hi-hat mic or, for that matter, a spot mic on any cymbal and, a pair mounted above a kit yielded excellent results as overheads on a full drum kit. Meanwhile on an acoustic guitar we got a crisp and precise sound with a presence peak in the mic's frequency response around 10kHz adding to the zing of the strings.

Verdict

So it seems there's something for every price point and task within the range. With the Perception series, AKG have come up with a very affordable and



Perception 120

It's upper-mid peak means it works well on acoustic guitars
£119

Perception 170

With it's pad engaged, the 170 works great as a cymbal spot mic
£119

The 420 is the most versatile and the 170 is also a useful tool for recording disparate instruments

well-made set of microphones that could easily become practical workhorses on your recording projects. If you undertake a variety of recording tasks, the 420, with its multiple

patterns, is the most versatile and the 170 is also a useful tool for recording disparate instruments, particularly if you need to get close or into a tight space. If you are on a tight budget and just

looking for a vocal recording mic, the 120 will do the job admirably but could also easily lend itself to other tasks. This sector of the market has

become very crowded with a whole slew of microphone companies having a multi-pattern condenser, large diaphragm cardioid condenser and slimline condenser in their line-ups.

These Perception mics are three more to add to your list for consideration and may have an advantage due to the kudos of their historical lineage. **FM**

AKG and Budget Mics

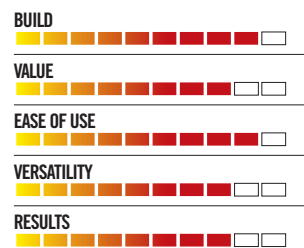
AKG have produced some classic condenser mics since the company was founded in late 1940s Vienna. The C12 valve microphone is regarded as one of the best vocal recording mics ever and the C414 is the go-to condenser for a whole range of studio tasks. Now,

AKG have seen the benefit in providing more affordable mics for those who record on a smaller scale or who have a tight budget. After looking at how the microphone market was changing with the boom in home recording, the company lowered prices on their C1000S and C3000B mics in

1997 and apparently saw sales increase over eight-fold. Also in the 1990s, in a bid to combat the flood of cheaper mics coming in from Asia, AKG introduced a budget range – the Emotion series. The Perception series aims to provide some AKG mojo at an affordable price.



FutureMusic VERDICT



A good quality range of utilitarian condenser mics that won't break the bank.

SPECS

Frequency Range: 20Hz - 20kHz

Max SPL for 0.5% THD: 155dB (420, 170), 150dB (120) Polar pattern: Cardioid, omni, figure of 8 (420), cardioid (120, 170)

Preattenuation pad: -20dB (switchable)

Bass cut filter slope (420, 120 only): 12dB/octave, 300Hz

Connector: Three-pin XLR

Power source: Phantom power 48V ±4V

Extras: mic clip (120, 170), Aluminium carrying case, suspension cradle (420)

Weight:
420 & 120
525g
170
130g

ALTERNATIVES



Rode NT2A, NT1A, NT5

£239

Three roughly equivalent mics from the Aussie manufacturer

rodemic.com



SE Electronics SE4400A, SE2200A, SE1A

£379

Quality mics designed and built in Shanghai

seelectronics.com



Sontronics Orpheus, STC-2, STC-1

£343, £159, £104

Designed and developed in the UK, built in the far east

sontronics.com