



Lauten CLARION FC-357

Promising the smooth tones of classic FET mics comes the Lauten Clarion FC-357. Huw Price checks it out.

KEY FEATURES

- Cardioid, omni & figure-8
- +10dB gain switch
- -10dB attenuation switch
- FET preamp circuitry
- Transformer balanced output
- 25Hz-25kHz
- Dynamic range: 120dB
- Max SPL: 130dB
- Sensitivity: 16mV/Pa

Clarion FC-357

Manufacturer **Lauten**

Price **£519**

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Some microphones make you feel excited about plugging them in on first sight. It's hard to define why, but the Lauten Clarion is a case in point. Maybe it's the classy satin sheen of the metallic grey finish, the crispness of the enamelled badge or the sheer weight and solidity of the build. Either way, this mic impresses before you've even removed it from the bamboo box. Other accessories include a suspension cradle shockmount and a slip-over windshield.

FETs at home

Not all the great mics of the past were valve-based. In fact, since the late 1960s, studios have mostly relied on condenser microphones and mic preamps that were equipped with Field Effect Transistor electronics. These devices are commonly referred to as FETs and they're capable of producing superb results. The Neumann U47FET and U87 as well as the AKG C414 are all FET mics and no one can question their great track records.

So the Clarion, with its FET circuitry and specially wound output transformer, is clearly in good company. Suggested applications include vocals, voiceover,

instruments and overheads, which more or less implies that this is intended for general-purpose use.

Although there's no bass roll-off switch you can select cardioid, omnidirectional and figure-8 pickup patterns, plus there's a gain switch that provides 10dB boost as well as 10dB cut. This is the first time we've seen this feature on a microphone and it allows

THE LAUTEN CLARION PRODUCES BIG, CLEAR SOUNDS WITH A REFRESHING ABSENCE OF SIBILANCE.

you to get more of the microphone character and rely less on the gain from a preamp.

The specs claim self-noise levels below 15dB and maximum SPL handling of 130dB with the pad engaged. Both ultra-thin diaphragms are 28.25mm in diameter with gold layers and phantom powered.

Clarion call

We started with our usual acoustic guitar test, making three identically recorded samples and comparing the pickup patterns. As soon as we pushed up the fader on the cardioid recording it sounded exactly like the guitar or, more accurately, exactly how we'd like that guitar to sound. The tone was powerful, warm, smooth and very intimate, with a mere hint of extra sheen in the top end.

Next we listened to the omni recording and that sounded just like the guitar too, but it was more open, slightly leaner in tone and more even through the bass end. Of the three, figure-8 probably sounded the most natural and honest. It combined the omni setting's sparkle with the intimacy of the cardioid setting, but, unlike the other two, it didn't smooth over the rough edges.

This was a very encouraging start, which demonstrated that all three settings offered subtle variations, each one eminently useful. So you won't need to reset your mic amp every time you change the pickup setting.

Similarly excellent results were achieved on male and female vocals. The Clarion produces big, clear sounds with a refreshing absence of sibilance. These qualities benefited electric guitars too because there was none of the upper midrange harshness sometimes exhibited by large-capsule condensers.

Among the reasons that mics like the U87, U47 and C414 became so popular was the fact that you could stick them on anything and get a useable sound straight off; with a bit of fine-tuning you could often get amazing results. The Clarion falls into the same category. OK, there's no HPF switch, but most mic preamps have them these days.

Quite frankly we can't find anything to dislike about the Clarion. It's a strong contender for the best all-round

condenser in its price range and we suspect it could even embarrass some of the pricier competition in a head-to-head test. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Superb warm sound
- Consistent pickup patterns
- Competitively priced
- A genuine all-rounder

WALK ON BY

- No HPF switch
- Slight taming of transients

VERDICT

We'd describe this fine-sounding, three-pattern all-rounder as a 'proper microphone'. It's highly recommended



MEASURING UP

The Lauten Clarion compares very favourably with the slightly brighter-sounding Sontronics Saturn (£699). Other mics currently shooting for the all-rounder crown include the four-pattern sE 4400a (£399) and the three-pattern Audio-Technica AT4050 (£500). Both have HPF and attenuation switching, too.