

Freedom Road!

The S4.16 UHF wireless system from Trantec offers up to 16 transmission frequencies and is still incredibly easy to use. Is it the ultimate affordable wireless solution?

One of the best things about the wireless systems that have come onto the market recently is their usability. Manufacturers, it seems, are all too aware that potential wireless fans are deterred by what they see as a somewhat bewildering world. Terms like 'squellch' and 'true diversity' can be off-putting to anyone who just wants to sing his or her songs without having to worry about tripping over yards of cable. The other big deterrent with wireless systems is the cost. A conventional microphone with a similar technical specification to a wireless one will always be considerably cheaper to buy, although the advantages of using a wireless mic can easily counter-balance the extra cost. Trantec have tried to reach a compromise with the S4.16 wireless system. It's not overly expensive, it's extremely user-friendly and, most impressively, it offers a wide range of transmission frequencies. So how does it measure up?

Taking the mic...

We were sent two different systems to review: the handheld microphone and the instrument beltack. The microphone is a little larger than a conventional microphone, so it's good therefore to see that the larger size stand-clamp comes as part of the package; many manufacturers expect you to go out and find your own. The size is accounted for by the fact that the microphone has to hold not only a radio transmitter but also the battery to power it — in this case, one of those ubiquitous 9-Volt jobs (PP3). The battery compartment is accessed via a simple twist and pull action to the upper part of the microphone body. Pulling this section of the microphone upwards also reveals the channel selection screw. This is marked 1-15 (only the

odd numbers are marked on the channel selector) and mirrors a similar control on the receiver. The numbers represent the sixteen channels that the microphone has been set up to transmit on.

At the bottom end of the microphone is a small aerial, like the ones you used to get on mobile phones. Next to this a tiny power On/Off button with an accompanying little LED to tell you if the battery is working. As I write this I realise that after I was using the microphone I forgot to switch it back off and that the battery is now dead... Oops. Let this be a lesson to you — it is easy (depending on how much you've had to drink post-gig) to forget to switch the microphone off, and hence it's always worth having a store of



Review by **CM Stevenson**

musicmart

Trantec S4.16 £299

Key Notes

- Operating frequencies UK: 863.150 - 861.750MHz.
- Frequency response: Handheld 80Hz - 16kHz.
- Frequency response: Beltack 60Hz - 16kHz.
- Handheld transmitter: Dynamic with cardioid polar pattern.
- Lavalier microphone: back electret condenser with omni-directional polar pattern.
- Receiver controls: channel select, gain and mute level.
- Receiver dimensions: 35 x 213 x 98mm.

High Notes

- Incredibly easy and intuitive to get to grips with.
- Sixteen user-changeable channels.
- True diversity receiver.
- PLL Quartz tuning ensures strong signal.
- Textured grip on handheld transmitter.

Low Notes

- Beltack made from thin plastic, lid comes off a little too easily.
- Mute level control can cause clipping if set too high.

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fresh batteries to hand.

At the top of the microphone, the metal basket looks like it could come in handy in a bar brawl and still protect the capsule inside. Inside the basket is a foam baffle, which acts as a barrier against wind noise and sibilance. The transducer this lot is protecting from the outside world is dynamic with a typical cardioid polar response pattern, designed primarily to suit vocals. One of the nicest things about this microphone is the textured grip, which makes it really comfortable to hold. It's a smart idea when you consider that being wireless will inevitably encourage you to expend more energy on stage, jumping from the lighting rig, climbing the PA stack etc.

Belt Up!

This system also comes as an instrumental beltack for the same price. The instrument set-up also comes with what's known as a Lavalier microphone, designed to be clipped to a tie or coat lapel and make the user look like a secret service agent. Incidentally, I discovered that you could also attach it to the side of an acoustic guitar with a blob of blu-tack, making for a surprisingly good pickup.

The beltack itself is more or less the same size and shape as a packet of fags. It can either be slipped into a pocket, or if you're wearing skin-tight leather trousers (you know who you are) then it can be attached to your belt via a small clip on the back. A small lid lifts off the front like the bonnet of a toy car to reveal space for... yep, you guessed it, one of those 9-Volt batteries again. If you look closely at the back of the inside of the unit you'll see two teeny rotaries, one marked Gain and one marked with the numbers 1-15, as with the microphone transmitter. There's also a tiny slide switch marked INST/MIC that changes the gain of the unit depending on whether you have a guitar or a secret service microphone plugged in to it.

As with the microphone transmitter, there is a tiny mobile-phone-style aerial and then next to that a mini-jack input. The jack input has a thread corresponding to a thread on the guitar/microphone lead so that it is actually screwed in rather than just secured. It's a really sensible feature when you consider the amount of jumping up and down you'll be doing without a conventional guitar lead to constrain you. There's an On/Off button on the front of the pack and a small red Power LED just above it.

Reception Class

The receiver for both systems is the same. It's light and about the size of a video cassette, for anyone who remembers them. With rubber feet, it should be fairly stable anywhere, even on a wobbly bar table.

The receiver uses true diversity (two antennae working independently to find

the strongest signal) so reception should be consistent, even when the receiver is out of sight of the transmitter. On the front are a number of LEDs, comprising a power on light, a basic four LED radio signal meter, two LEDs to denote which of the antenna is receiving the stronger signal and an audio signal peak warning light. Round the back, along with a DC input and the channel selector screws is a gain level screw and one marked Mute Level. The mute level control uses the same principle as a squelch control (old BBC radio terminology) and is designed to prevent unwanted noise from being transmitted. We found this control did create some strange clipping effects if used over-enthusiastically, any Jarvis-inspired whispering simply cuts out if it's set too high. Outputs comprise both a balanced XLR and an unbalanced quarter-inch mono jack.

Performance

The Trantec S4.16 UHF system is incredibly easy to set up — it's just a case of making sure you have the channel on the receiver set to the same as the microphone or beltack transmitter and the gain and mute levels set according to your needs. I found it best to leave the gain control in the twelve o'clock position, with the mute level rotary just ticking over so as to avoid any clipping. I encountered no signal problems with either the beltack or the handheld microphone and even in another room the transmission signal was good. As I've already mentioned, the Lavalier microphone

Racked and Ready

If you're going to run a number of receivers together, and don't forget, it's possible to run sixteen simultaneously, Trantec offers what it calls its Racked and Ready package. This basically comprises a bespoke set-up comprising either four, eight or 12 receivers housed in a purpose-built rack. The various packages also include any combination of beltack or handheld transmitters, power supplies, antenna distribution units, antenna head amps, 10m of antenna cable, antennae mounting kit and stands. Prices for Racked and Ready set-ups start at £1,895.

did a pretty decent job of amplifying my acoustic guitar, while the handheld microphone delivered a warm, punchy tonality that really cut through above the sound of the instruments.

Conclusion

The great thing about this set-up is that it builds on the company's already excellent S4.4 system by providing a further 12 user-changeable channels. Furthermore, along with transmitting on the superior UHF waveband (no taxi cabs mid-solo!) this set-up is incredibly easy to operate, while still offering many of the features one would demand from a professional rig. If you're wanting to use a number of wireless microphones or beltack transmitters together but don't want to get into the hassles and cost of professional frequency agile set-ups, then this system will be more than up to the task. **mm**

