

JDK Audio R22 Review

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MYLES BOISEN · MAY 11, 2010



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An olive-green paint job and military styling makes the JDK Audio R22 (\$1,195 MSRP) stereo compressor look like it could have been scavenged from a Cold War–era submarine. But the JDK imprint—designed and manufactured by the venerable API company—is a relative newcomer on the boutique audio scene. The R22 is a 2-channel, solid-state compressor with two sets of fully independent controls and channel linking for use on stereo mixes.

OLD SCHOOL

In the center of the two-rackspace control panel are twin backlit VU meters that can be switched to indicate gain reduction or output level. A funky "60s-style nameplate under the meters adds to the retro-industrial appeal, ensuring the unit's status as a potential conversation piece in any control room. Identical controls are arrayed to the left and right of the central meters.

Across the top of the control array is a single LED—to indicate that audio signal has reached threshold—and three toggle switches. These switches select Thrust or flat response, soft or hard knee, and meter status (gain reduction or output). The switchable Thrust circuit filters the low end of the audio spectrum before it triggers the compressor circuitry to lessen loss of punch and the overcompression of transients.

Knobs with calibration markings are laid out along the bottom of the faceplate. These govern compressor threshold (-4dBu to +15dBu), ratio (1:1 to 10:1), and makeup gain (0dB to +20dB). There are no controls for attack or release time. However, the R22 employs an automatic timing circuit that varies its attack and release characteristics in response to highly transient or steady-state audio.

Bypass switches for each channel are found on either side of the JDK nameplate. The R22 employs a true hard-wired bypass that will pass signal even when the unit is powered down. An on/off switch with a red LED indicator is located on the bottom-right corner of the front panel. Balanced TRS ¼-inch and XLR inputs and outputs are mounted on the back panel, along with a standard IEC power connector, mains voltage setting, and fusing.

THE THRUST OF IT

Despite the lack of a manual online or in the shipping box, I found the R22 to be easy to set up and use. A manual is scheduled to be available online by the time you read this. My first experience with the unit was inserting it on a vocal in a mix for the band Dandeline. I was pleased to hear that there was no noticeable coloration or level change in the lead vocal track after putting the JDK compressor in the signal chain. It was easy to hear what all the controls did, and except for the Thrust switch, all features were self-explanatory. In this application, I found the ability to dial in a low compression ratio (less than 2:1) to be a very effective fine-tuning tool. And the Thrust switch worked subtly to bring the vocal to the front of the mix, without making it edgy or artificial-sounding.

The R22 also got a workout on a blues session for vocalist Fillmore Slim. For an acoustic harmonica track, the hard-knee feature worked like a charm on guest singer and famed blues harp player Rick Estrin. And on a cameo by New Orleans rapper Breeze, the R22 worked well during tracking to maintain dynamic consistency across a number of comped tracks. Engaging the Thrust switch helped to add intelligibility to Breeze's laid-back vocal style.

I have to admit that at first the lack of attack and release controls on the JDK compressor was disconcerting. But time and time again in the studio, I found the R22's performance to be so musical and smooth that I didn't miss having to make these additional adjustments. In additional tests, the JDK compressor delivered mastering-quality, uncolored response in keeping with its stated spec of $\pm 0.5\text{dB}$ from 20Hz to 50kHz.

SOLID PERFORMER

For a compressor in this price range, one might expect more bells and whistles, or some flavor of magic box coloration akin to that of sought-after vintage compressors. But it is worth it to know that you can run dual-mono or stereo signals through the R22 without hyping the highs or lows or adding distortion artifacts (whether desirable or not). Simplicity and high fidelity are major selling points of the JDK Audio R22, and for smooth, clean, and musical compression, it does its job very well.

Overall rating (1 through 5): 4

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BY MYLES BOISEN



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