



JDK Audio R22

The R22 delivers boutique-grade, true stereo compression at an affordable price. Mark Cousins takes a listen.

KEY FEATURES

- Patented Thrust circuit
- Variable threshold, ratio and make-up gain controls
- Switchable metering of output level and gain reduction
- Above-threshold LED indication
- Switchable hard or soft knee compression
- Linkable for stereo operation

R22

Manufacturer **JDK Audio**

Price **£899**

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The name JDK Audio may be a new one to many MTM readers, but its parent company, API, should be more familiar, especially for those who have used its popular 500 Series 'Lunchbox' signal processors (or, indeed, the Waves API Collection plug-in suite). JDK Audio is an offshoot company designed to cut loose from some of the entrenched design philosophies behind the API product range. The results of these efforts have been a range of affordable 'boutique' signal processors, arguably missing out on a few expensive transformers, but without sacrificing on the overall build quality and audio performance associated with API.

Technically speaking, the R22 compressor is actually based on the same compression circuit built-in to an ATI Paragon live console. The Paragon doesn't perhaps have quite the same lineage as certain other vintage compressors, but it's certainly a ringing enough endorsement in terms of practical day-to-day usage. The R22 has a striking appearance, with a build quality and livery that looks like its been pulled out of a Sherman tank – complete with chunky rackmount handles, prominent VU meters and a set of controls clearly designed for man-sized hands. Around the back of

the unit, the R22 also has a healthy set of connections, covering both balanced XLR and 1/4-inch jack inputs and outputs. So, no grumbles on that front either, then.

Gain control

Overall the R22 is easy to use, with an uncomplicated set of controls, clear metering and predictable performance. For example, the LED above the threshold control makes it easy to understand the point at which the gain-reduction circuitry is being triggered. Likewise, the lack of discrete attack and release controls (instead, the unit has a responsive timing circuit that adapts to the material) ultimately means you can simply dial in a ratio setting, restore some gain makeup, then sit back and watch the R22 do all the work.

Sonically, the R22 provides controlled and polished compression, ranging from a gentle massaging of levels around a 2:1 ratio through to something considerably heavier above the 6:1 ratio. Although the lack of attack and release controls inhibits the creation of 'pumpier' compression effects or heavy transient-smacking, we didn't feel that the R22's movements in and out of gain reduction needed much in the way of refinement, and it seemed empathetic enough to the range of signals (including drums, vocals and bass) that we passed through it.

Maximum thrust

Beyond the basic threshold and ratio settings, the R22 has two further controls to affect the behaviour of the

compression. The first control – a switchable knee setting – should be familiar, enabling you to shape the R22's compression around the threshold point, moving between a hard knee (for more noticeable gain reduction) and soft knee (which is far more suitable for transparent gain control).

A Thrust control, though, is slightly more unusual, though it's a feature that's common to many API compressors. This effectively filters the compressor's RMS detector so that the gain reduction escapes excessive modulation from low-frequency signals.

Feeling the squash

Given the highly competitive pricing, it's hard not to be impressed by the performance of this compressor. Although it possibly lacks some of the character and colour (or distortion, if you want to look at it that way) of other, more expensive compressors, it still delivers an efficient and musical gain control that's an asset to any mix.

The R22's ease of use is also a real point in its favour, especially as it seems to sound good whichever way you configure the controls, as well as responding in a logical and effective way to your interactions with it. In short, you won't be struggling to find the 'right' compression – you can simply dial it in and carry on with the mix.

Of course, if you're a real compression nut, there are plenty of more expensive compressors – including some by API – that deliver a more nuanced set of controls and have a greater range of colours to play with. But if you just want an easy-to-use, great-sounding, true stereo compressor, there's little to rival the R22. **MIX**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Easy to use
- Pleasing sound and performance
- Impressive price
- Industrial-strength build
- Clear threshold metering
- Stereo and mono operation

WALK ON BY

- No attack and release controls
- Lacks some of the character of more expensive boutique compressors

VERDICT

A great first hardware compressor – the R22 won't break the bank, but it delivers an impressive performance and looks great.



MEASURING UP

Sonically reliable stereo compressors are hard to find under the £1,000 mark, with really good 'character' compressors such as Universal Audio's 2-1176 costing almost £2,000. TLA's Ivory 5021 is more affordable (around £500), although we were really more taken by the gain reduction and sonic qualities delivered by the R22.