

# Cloud Microphones JRS-34 Active Ribbon Microphone

PAR's technical editor (and resident "ribbon mic snob") puts the JRS-34 through its paces against the toughest competition, yet finds some magnificent applications for it.

I believe I wrote this review wrong. Well, maybe not wrong, but backwards. You see, when I first received a pair of Cloud JRS-34 active ribbon microphones for evaluation, I put them up on stands in front of my favorite players and challenged the mics to impress me.

Let me explain why that was wrong: I am a relative latecomer to the ribbon microphone craze, but I have spent the past eight years becoming a ribbon mic aficionado (some might call me a ribbon mic snob). I currently own nine (I owned 14 at one time) and have auditioned dozens more, even comparing 14 of them on different instruments on my 3D Audio *Ribbon Roundup* CD. I have found applications where they deliver a sound no other style of mic can, and my ribbon mics are in and out of my mic coffin as much as any of my favorite mics. When a ribbon mic is offered to me for review, the stakes are very high. My evaluation is not typical compared to many ribbon mic buyers.

So, I essentially asked this JRS-34 pair to beat my favorite ribbon mics through my favorite preamps on certain instruments, combinations that I have developed over years of use. And they didn't. But to be fair,



that's a nearly impossible task for any microphone.

## In Use

The better test came when I was in a studio without my own mics, a studio that didn't have a single ribbon mic. Fortunately, I had brought along the Clouds. On this Dixieland-flavored recording, the JRS-34 revealed its true strengths. I tried it on clarinet, tenor and baritone saxophone, trombone and trumpet, and it did a magnificent job everywhere. I appreciated the figure-8 pattern greatly when I used it in a horrible-sounding booth, and I was able to minimize the problematic bounce off the walls. And the acoustic separation they afforded me when using them separately on trumpet and trombone, even side by side in a live room, was shocking and a real problem solver. This was through a Trident 80C with little to no EQ.

## Features

So, now that you know what I think, what is the JRS-34? The first mic offering from Cloud Microphones — a young company from Tucson, AZ — the active JRS-34 is also available in a passive form, the JRS-34-P. Though the JRS-34 is a new product, it is

built on the shoulders of giants, incorporating the storied background of Jon R. Sank (hence the JRS moniker), designer of several classic RCA ribbon

microphones. You can read more history at Cloud's website, [cloudmicrophones.com](http://cloudmicrophones.com), and learn about Stephen Sank (Jon Sank's son) and his involvement in this design.

The first thing I noticed when opening the JRS-34's case was its striking resemblance to an RCA 44, one of the two most recognizable ribbon mics ever made (the other being the RCA 77). More than one musician wondered aloud who was making this "new 44." But its radical difference from the 44 was apparent when I pulled the mic from its wooden case. Though it has a similar face, it's about a third as thick as a 44 and weighs probably six pounds less. Both the size and weight savings are accomplished by the use of neodymium magnets. The JRS-34's design is very clean — as well constructed as any ribbon mic on the market — and the integral XLR connector is nice to have instead of a captive cable. The mic mount offers limited range but that will have been addressed before you read this. It doesn't come with a shockmount, which is problematic for a ribbon mic due to their sensitivity at low frequencies, but it offers other things. [Cloud explains: "The JRS-34 is internally shockmounted by a spring suspension system mounting the ribbon motor." — Ed.]

The JRS-34 incorporates many unique design elements, like rounded ribbon motor surfaces near the ribbon itself and a spring-mounted motor assembly (reminiscent of old crystal mics). I was curious to see if I noticed an impact on the sound, but I can't honestly say that I did, comparing it to other ribbon mics I own. The mic is very quiet; I never noticed any noise coming from the mic at all. One drawback I encountered is the mic's physical size, at 6.5 inches tall and 3 inches wide, but that will only be a problem for positioning it in certain applications or, as I experienced, when miking players who need to read charts and the mic might block their view of the music. On the flip side, it's smaller than lots of LDCs.

### Summary

The JRS-34's major advantages are its solid build quality, light weight, historical tribute design and the fact that it is made in the U.S. Really, the only drawback is the price, which is higher since parts are not sourced from the Pacific Rim. Cloud



is committed to making a quality product here in the United States and several concerns of mine — issues I discovered during my time with these mics — were resolved and incorporated into the assembly process.

In conclusion, this is a respectable performer, sourced with pride from the U.S. and deserves a listen and comparison to other mics in this price range.

In my review, I used the JRS-34 with Neve, Millennia Media, Trident 80C, GT Vipre, Great River and Crane Song preamps. I auditioned it on drums, guitar, strings, clarinet, trumpet, trombone and sax.

Price: \$1,799 list  
Cloud Microphones | 888-365-3278 | [cloudmicrophones.com](http://cloudmicrophones.com)

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