

Review: Pearl Priority Microphone

If the only rectangular transducer in your kit is a ribbon (albeit a corrugated rectangle), then you owe it to yourself to try the Priority.

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At first glance, one might miss the uniqueness of Swedish microphone manufacturer Pearl and its Priority large diaphragm condenser, as its simple cylindrical body harbors no switches, buttons or controls. Yet look a little closer and see its rectangular diaphragm in the head basket. Yes, you've guessed it: a rectangular surface reacts to sound waves differently compared to a typical disc-shaped design.

Feature-wise, there's not much to observe in the Priority: an attractive steel head basket houses Pearl's approximately 30 mm x 15 mm Model 2900 large diaphragm capsule—or membrane, as Pearl calls it—with a single green LED indicating when 48V phantom is supplied. Impedance is a low 100 ohms, self-noise a low 14 dB, with frequency response from 20 Hz to 20 kHz.

Apparently, Pearl has a new production method for the membrane, making it much easier to manufacture, keeping price surprisingly low. The Priority comes with a standard mic clip and ships in a leather pouch inside a whiskey style cardboard tube.

Prior to this review, I had heard that rectangular membranes tend towards linear response and realism, much like Pearl's CC22 cardioid mic—the company's most popular mic model, even though they have numerous

stereo and long membrane models. The Priority possesses that characteristic of flatness and neutrality, but with a three dB presence rise centered around 5 kHz.

As I mounted the Priority onto a tripod boom for some vocal tracking I found its most unfortunate issue: the small mic clip holds the Priority's shaft, yet the shaft is extremely short, allowing way too much play and not nearly enough grip. Further, the mic's XLR connector is oriented so that the cable's XLR connector release tab faces the rear of the mic clip where the tab is depressed, releasing the mic (please see attached pic). It's a terrible design that complicates positioning and awaits accidents in placement.

[Update, as of Feb 2, 2016: Pearl has replaced this clip with a new, well-fitted design—Ed.]

Upon hearing my vocalist captured by the Priority, it became apparent that Pearl isn't kidding about its reported realism. The presence rise didn't seem all that pronounced to me; the tone was basically flat, and the dynamics were distinct and real, so the overall presentation was a little too "reference" for this particular rock 'n roll track.

Soon, I found myself curiously applying the Priority to any source I could. Acoustic guitar was a nice fit for the mic with its stark realism: no harshness at all up top; enough presence rise for clarity and cut; very honest and quite revealing mids; and a balance that was more classical than hyped. I had the same results with the Priority on percussion; its lack of personality and typical condenser sizzle allowed the perc to sit in the mix as if a bright ribbon was used, yet with less chubbiness down low compared to a ribbon. For that matter, instruments of all kinds exhibited the same consistent response from the Priority.

I even received good results on drum room—about 6 feet out from kit, about as high as the drum throne, angled slightly downward. It was an unassuming, neutral voicing with good balance from bottom to top.

Placement considerations became very apparent with drums; even though the Priority is cardioid from side to side, the response on the vertical axis has nulls with different pattern and frequency sensitivities than the sides; users must watch the mic's tilt and swivel. That said, such characteristics give some unique and interesting placement options and variables. Listen to my review webclip here: <https://soundcloud.com/pro-audio-review-magazine>.

If the only rectangular transducer in your kit is a ribbon (albeit a corrugated rectangle), then you owe it to yourself to try the Priority. For that matter, Audio-Technica now has its AT5040 model with four rectangular diaphragms, reportedly sharing many of the Priority's propensities for realism. Meanwhile, Pearl has numerous mic models with plenty of options. The sonic differences (between rectangles and discs) are indeed audible, significant and offer utility to those who have mic placement down to a science.

The Priority is only \$799 street. You may find that its sonic uniqueness and unusual performance fits nicely into a versatile and varied professional mic collection.