# REVIEW

# Extinct Audio
# BoRbon

*A new wood–body,
petite British ribbon mic*



**REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.**

Based in York, England, Extinct Audio has been crafting British handmade ribbon microphones since 2017. The latest Extinct Audio offering is the evocatively named BoRbon (I pronounce it bor-bon or bourbon). While the word 'unique' gets thrown around liberally these days, how many ribbon mics can you name that fit in the palm of your hand and are housed in wood bodies?

## The Extinct Family

Extinct Audio grew out of head designer Stewart Tavener's other endeavor, Xaudia, where, for close to two decades running, he has been repairing, modifying, and upgrading classic ribbon mics. We first met Stewart and Extinct Audio in our January 2020 issue when we reviewed the BM9 and Black Ops (a BM9 tweaked for high SPL sources).

The Extinct lineup also includes a stereo BM9 named the Valkyr and the large-scale Berserker ribbon mic.

## The Little Wooden BoRbon

The new BoRbon is one of the smallest ribbon mics I have ever seen. Measuring 3.38" T 1.58" W x .75" D, it's about the size of a British 'Bourbon biscuit' (what we "Yanks" would call a sandwich cookie)—I don't know if this is how the name came about, but I think it's a great rumor to spread.

The body is constructed of five layers of laser-cut birch plywood. The front and back come in a choice of stained wood, red acrylic tortoiseshell or a limited gold-sparkle acrylic finish.

A right-angle XLR connector lives on the back of the body, and the mic weighs less than a third of a pound.

## Mount Up

Each mic has a slim, rectangular nylon pouch and a specialized mic mount.

The Mount-A-Mic Mk2 mic mount—a BoRbon-specific modification of the original Mount-A-Mic cable released on the Xaudia blog in 2014—centers around a 2.5" x 1" piece of 3-ply wood with a 13" end-to-end XLR cable screwed onto one end and a mic mount on the other. A picture describes it best.



The Mount-A-Mic Mk2

The mic clips onto the female end of the XLR cable, sitting on the wood plank, and is ready for use. The cable is held onto the wooden plank via the plastic screw on the cable cap, and it may need to be gently retightened from time to time.

## Itty-Bitty Ribbon

Traditionally, most ribbon mics, vintage and modern, make use of large, long, wide ribbons (50mm x 5mm on average); the BoRbon harkens back to early British designs from "extinct" companies such as Reslo, Grampian, Film Industries and Lustraphone. Many of these companies built mics that used smaller ribbon elements (around 25mm x 2.5mm or less than 1" x .10" wide).

Stewart points out that large-size ribbons were used in most 1940s-era ribbon mics and beyond because the magnets needed to be sizable to offer an effective output. However, today, smaller and stronger magnets allow the petite motor assembly and small aluminum ribbon in the BoRbon to provide an output similar to the larger mics.

The Fig. 8 patterned ribbon in the BoRbon is an offset design, meaning it is a few millimeters closer to the front than the back of the mic.

The BoRbon is a passive ribbon mic with no active circuitry and uses a custom output transformer.

## Specs

The BoRbon has an output impedance of 200 ohms at 1 kHz, a frequency response of 50 Hz–15 kHz @ ±6dB, a max SPL of 130dB @ 20 Hz, a self-noise of -132 dBV and a sensitivity of 1.6 mV/Pa, -56 dBv/Pa at 1 kHz.

## Big, Thick, Classic Sound

The BoRbon has a bold proximity effect that gives any up-close source a huge, rich low-end tonality. The mic is exceptionally smooth, and overall, its mids fall into the neutral, "captures a source as is" rather than the upper mid-forward ribbon family of mics like the company's own BM9 and Black Ops or a Royer R-Series offering.

The top-end of the BoRbon is incredibly round and smooth—even a touch on the 'warm' side. It still captures high-end sources with plenty of detail, it just does so with a nice pillowy rounding.

Side-by-side with an AEA R44CE, it holds its own regarding output level and a big full capture. In many instances, when used at distances from 6" to a few feet from a source, the two mics exhibit a similar low-end and midrange signature. However, the proximity effect on the BoRbon offers a touch more low-end bloom as you move in close. The top-end of the BoRbon is much more rounded than the R44CE and was comparatively closer to the top-end of my Royer R-121.

The BoRbon has a tight yet tonal natural off-axis rejection. Interestingly, despite the offset ribbon design, I found the tone of the front and rear lobes to be almost identical and nowhere near as different as the also offset Royer R-121. I did notice a 1.2dB difference in level (when measured in my DAW), more so than any discernible change in tone.
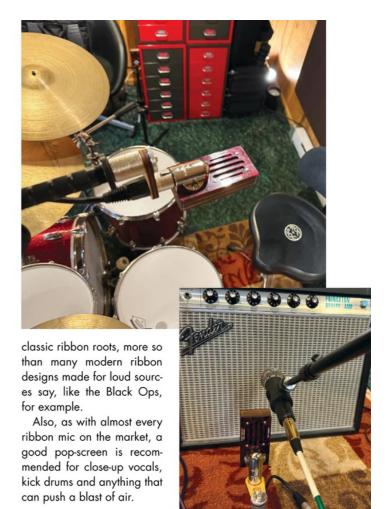
## In Use

The BoRbon is a great, smooth vocal mic, perfect for crooning and sweet-toned vocal passages, especially with its proximity effect in play. It is a nice, even acoustic guitar mic and moving the mic 1" at a time yields wonderful big changes to help seat the tone in the mix.

My favorite use was on drums, where this mic's size and weight make overhead use a joy to set up. I like the BoRbon as both a spaced pair of overheads and in a Glyn Johns setup. Even more, I loved using one BoRbon as a mono overhead about 2-3' above the kit, with a second BoRbon about 6" to 1' in front of a kick drum skin with a pop-filter for protection (and nowhere near a port-hole)—talk about a thick, old-school, vintage mono drum sound.

It also makes a very versatile electric guitar mic. Close to the speaker, the proximity effect yields a massive, bold sound, while moving the mic back 2–3' chills out the low-end and offers a natural tone with a nice touch of depth and space.
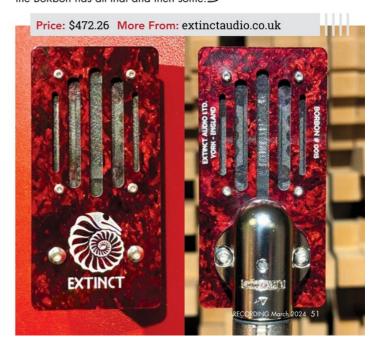
One thing to note is if you are too close to a loud, aggressive source (drums, cranked guitar cabinet or a loud singer), the BoRbon can break up and distort—more an issue of headroom versus endangering the ribbon. This is a nod to the mic's



classic ribbon roots, more so than many modern ribbon designs made for loud sources say, like the Black Ops, for example.

Also, as with almost every ribbon mic on the market, a good pop-screen is recommended for close-up vocals, kick drums and anything that can push a blast of air.

## Wrap Up

The Extinct Audio BoRbon is an impressive entry into the world of ribbon mics. It is uniquely built, amazingly small and light, and yet sounds absolutely massive. Also, the choice by Extinct Audio to use a locally sourced laser-cut plywood body rather than custom or even imported metalwork means that the mic is much more affordable than you might guess—so much so that I would recommend a pair.

If you crave a ribbon mic with a classic, rich vintage tone, the BoRbon has all that and then some. ⤴

**Price:** $472.26   **More From:** extinctaudio.co.uk



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