

What is it? USB-powered plug-and-play condenser microphone

PRICE: £69

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► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

Mac and PC: Mac or PC with free USB port

► **TEST MACHINE**

Mac: Apple iBook G4 1.33GHz, 1.25GB RAM, OS X 10.4.3

SAMSON C01U



The mic market is being flooded by ever cheaper and better models, but this new 'phone is a little different to anything else out there...

► **ALTERNATIVELY**

Rode NT1A
N/A >> N/A >> £128
If you already have a good pre, this is a fantastic mic for the price

Samson C01
N/A >> N/A >> £49
Another great value mic, though you'll still need a preamp

Every few years, a product comes along that takes the industry by storm. It's difficult to predict these products in advance – the trick is to make something insanely useful that nobody else offers.

Enter Samson and their new C01U. This is a USB condenser microphone that's based on their already acclaimed budget condenser mic, the C01. This offers almost-as-good-performance as Rode's NT1A (the budget class leader) but comes in at about a third of the price.

But never mind all that. Yes, you read correctly – the C01U is a plug-and-play USB condenser mic. This means that no preamp, XLR cable or phantom power is required – you can plug the C01U straight into your PC or Mac. All very convenient, but is it actually any good?

Reassuringly, the C01U feels sturdy and well built. Condenser mics tend not to like being dropped – which is why you rarely see them at gigs – but this one feels like it would wear well.

Installation is a breeze – it's no exaggeration to say that you can be up and running in two minutes flat. Basically, you just plug the C01U in and choose it from the list of audio

devices in your recording app. A simple software application enables you to set the microphone's internal gain and apply bass cut and phase inversion.

It all ADs up

So how does it sound? Very good, actually. The C01U is similar to its standard cousin, but because it connects over USB it requires onboard AD conversion. It'd be a huge let down if things weren't up to scratch in this department, but happily they are.

One downside is that the conversion is only 16-bit (at up to 48kHz). On paper, this seems a little light, but when compared to most budget preamps, the C01U has the edge in performance terms. It doesn't quite match our trusty NT1A and E-MU 1616M combo – the bass response isn't as good (though it's not so poor as to bother most people) and it's a little noisier – but when you consider that the C01U costs £400 less than these two bits of gear you can forgive such deficiencies. We did also notice some minor inconsistencies in pick up outside the narrow sweet spot, but unless you're



▲ At present, there's nothing else like the C01U on the market

▲ Use the bundled software to control the C01U's internal preamp

swinging your guitar around, the C01U should be fine.

Freak or unique?

This mic represents one of the best ideas we've come across in ages (and it is, at the time of writing, unique). It does exactly what it says on the tin and is incredibly affordable. If you need a basic condenser mic, you'd be crazy not to consider it. **cm**

VERDICT

FOR

- + Stunning value
- + Good overall sound
- + Well built
- + Installs in 30 seconds

AGAINST

- Pick up pattern can seem a little unpredictable
- 24-bit conversion next time please
- Still noisier than it ought to be

A unique and useful product. At this price, Samson deserve to sell C01Us by the truckload

RATING



What's so great about USB?

In both science and gadget design, there's a tendency to do things simply because they haven't been done before (regardless of whether or not anybody really needs them or not). The C01U certainly isn't a product of that kind of thinking: here we have a staggeringly useful mic that has relevance to laptop musicians, sound designers, students and, of course, studio producers.

By incorporating the preamp circuitry

into the mic itself, Samson have suddenly made it much easier for anyone to include a condenser in their portable rig. And because you can have one mic for every USB port, you could have up to six simultaneous mic channels running when you're on the road, and all without the need for any heavy cabling or additional hardware.

Also important is the huge cost saving. While many people like the

effect of real valves in a preamp, in our experience, the sound of budget analogue gear doesn't match the inconvenience and cost when compared to digital solutions. And with programs like Antares Mic Modeller doing an excellent job of emulating different types of mics, it's vital to get a good clean signal going in. There is no quicker, cheaper and easier way of doing this than with the C01U.