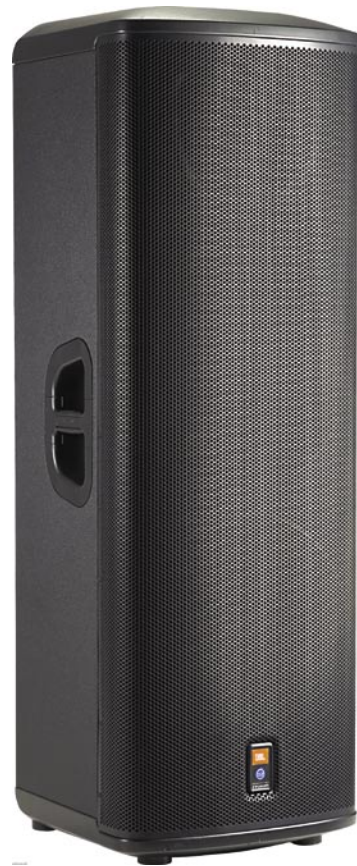


## JBL PRX525 & PRX518S

Has JBL done the impossible and overcome the bitter and twisted prejudices of this hard-bitten industry veteran?

**Text:** Grahame Harrison



► In this country and others, JBL was for many years *the* powerhouse brand. It was completely dominant. But, as we know in this market sector, the status quo never lasts too long. And, sure enough, as competition hotted up in the '90s JBL appeared to lose its way somewhat, in my opinion, and didn't seem to be addressing the criticisms levelled at it and lost ground – many still associate JBL with a 'honky' top end. These days, yes, there are the VerTec systems, which have done well, and there are the entry-level Eon systems (which define that market), and the Control series install speakers are in just about every pub, club or restaurant in the country, but in my experience JBL has work to do to regain a real presence in the 'serious muso' and 'driveway hire' market – the mid level. And here's where JBL's PRX series makes its entrance.

### MID LEVEL MIDRANGE

Last Saturday night I approached the local Ex-Servicemen's Club to test some of the new PRX range, and local Coffs Harbour band 'The Throwdowns' kindly volunteered to be lab rats. They're a tight four-piece rock band with good grooves and a professional attitude. We got on well... and we also got on well with the JBL boxes.

The PRX525 is a dual 15-inch/1.5-inch horny demon. These boxes look the goods. In fact, at first glance, they look remarkably like very large computer speakers! (Put a pair in your study and see how you get on.) The PRX range is self-powered by Crown Class-D amplifiers and the marriage is a good one. The 2408H neodymium compression horn driver features an 'Annular Polymer' (some space-age plastic, I'm guessing) diaphragm. The proprietary JBL265F 15-inch speakers feature 'Differential Drive' technology, which is basically a dual-coil, dual-gap application that places the neodymium magnet inside the voice coil assembly. The result is a very impressive, distortion-free sound.

The PRX525 has in-built DSP, which is smooth and

non-intrusive. But the outstanding part of the box's design is the use of three individual Crown amplifiers to drive the internal components. Two separate 275W amps drive the two 15s, while the horn is driven by a 100W amp. And they're all inside the box! And with all that artillery, the damn thing only weighs 38 kilograms! Seriously impressive stuff.

### THE SUBTEXT

The PRX518S sub speaker is in the same class, with the built-in Crown amp and a 2044E 18-inch woofer. The power rating is 500W. The trademarked 'Vented Gap Cooling' system is an excellent design and truly impressive to behold. At the urging of the irrepressible Peter Twartz, I removed the speaker from the box and took up his dare to extend my arm and hold the 18-inch speaker up with one finger. Yeah, right, Pete! Sure! But behold, he was correct and I was (and still am) dumbfounded! The neodymium magnet structure and aluminium basket make the drivers super light, which inevitably contributes to the overall low mass of the cabinets.

The 518S features a digital crossover, which is set at 110Hz. Most 18-inch subs are crossed over at around 80Hz to get some thump and air movement. I would have preferred to have some control over the crossover frequency via an increment button or some sort of optional interchangeable card method, but JBL has done this to prevent tampering by the unskilled – for good reason, perhaps. The box's specs indicate a frequency range of 37Hz to 140Hz, a power output of 500W and a polarity-reverse button. The sub has a pole mount adaptor and weighs only 36 kilograms.

### A CLEAR VISTA

The Vista Lounge at the Coffs Harbour Ex-Servicemen's Club can hold about 300 and is a beautiful venue in a great club (a personal thank you goes to Tony Ryan and the excellent staff and management – the cooperation extended was simply fantastic and was much-appreciated). The JBL

### NEED TO KNOW

#### Price

PRX525: \$3399;  
PRX518S: \$2899

#### Contact

Jands  
(02) 9582 0909  
sales@jands.com.au  
www.jands.com.au

#### Pros

Excellent design.  
Good looks.  
Sound good.  
Very light and portable.  
Great handles!

#### Cons

No transport wheels.  
No adjustment on sub crossover.  
No loop-thru 240V power.

#### Summary

An impressive system for small groups and muso's serious about their sound. Appropriate to some entry-level driveway hire as well. Very light weight and with built-in amps and DSP, this system is hard to fault and, believe me, I tried.

**“...at first glance, they look remarkably like very large computer speakers! (Put a pair in your study and see how you get on.)”**



PRX system filled the room very well. The sound was very clear, with the 'honk' that has traditionally bedevilled JBL designs well and truly gone from the horns. The 70° x 70° horn flare in the 525 was adequate, but I think I'd have preferred a 90° x 70° dispersion – the horizontal spread was not wide enough for my taste. However, the horn does its job very well within its parameters, and demonstrates some excellent throw. I walked 40 metres away from the PA stack into an adjacent room and I could still hear the band clearly.

The vocal clarity was excellent too, depth of sound very good, the bass guitar was defined, and I have no complaints about any aspect of the system's performance. I ran both the subs flat out and had the gain controls on the 525 boxes running at the recommended line level unity gain setting. At no time during the evening did the system show any signs of distress, even when 'cranked' during the last set. The internal limiters seemed to be tolerant and preset intelligently. The PRX525 features a dual-input connector with a loop-thru output connector as well. The sub has two sets of connectors, left and right – very clever and sensible. And obviously necessary! The one bummer was the lack of loop-thru 240V power outlets. Bit of an oversight for mine, although to be fair, each system is only rated at 5A mains draw, so you'd only typically be able to safely connect two together before running the risk of tripping breakers or melting cables, and no-one wants that! Finally, these boxes may not be heavyweights, and the carry handles are a real joy, but I'd still like to see the option of castors or some removable dollies perhaps.

As anyone who knows me will be aware, I am not the No. 1 ticket holder of the JBL fan club. I'm old enough to harbour a few grudges from the '70s and '80s. So it doesn't come easily for me to hand it to JBL and heartily recommend these PRX speakers – it's a well-designed new range that performs very solidly. They're not cheap (\$3,399 apiece for the 525S and \$2,899 for the sub) but, there again, they're well priced for what you get. ■