

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

Shells are from Pearl's Export Series while the pads are confidence-inspiring in terms of build quality and feel, and look like standard heads too

PEARL'S TRU-TRAC HEADS
make the drums significantly heavier than your average drums

RACK IS A NO-NONSENSE
arrangement of straight tubes that clamp together solidly





BRONZE CYMBALS
offer that extra degree
of familiar response

R.E.D. BOX LOOKS SPACE
age and can be installed
with third party kits



DRUMS ARE FAIRLY
hefty, with shells from
Pearl's former Export Series

PEARL E-PRO LIVE

From £2,725 The Big P weighs into the e-kit market. Jordan McLachlan tests their new acoustic/electronic hybrid kit

You're one of the biggest drum brands in the world. You want to get in on the electronic drum market.

So what do you do? Well, if you're Pearl, you design some clever heads to fit on some existing wallet-friendly shells and team them with a 'made-over' sound module that can be upgraded with kits from the likes of Toontrack, BFD, Ocean Way and more. The result? Certainly the most 'real looking' electronic offering from a big brand so far...

Build

Even before it's out of its respective boxes, one aspect of the e-Pro Live's nature makes its presence felt. It's a heavyweight. The hardware box in particular asks a lot of the biceps, and gives the impression that what lurks within isn't likely to be spindly 'bedroom-only' metalwork.

And indeed it isn't. Neither is the rack the kind of state-of-the-art ode to curiosity that some more established e-kit brands offer, especially with their flagship models. Instead the e-Pro relies on a no-nonsense arrangement of straight tubes that clamp together in solid fashion. Featherweight it might not be, but the rack is reassuringly sure on its feet and will lap up abuse. As will the rest of the hardware, culled from an extensive Pearl line-up that has proved itself on stages

around the world for years. Cymbal and tom holders are familiar fare and give nothing to grumble about.

Bringing the kit in on budget has meant sacrificing the kind of 'virtual hi-hat' - those that mount on real hi-hat stands - that top-end kits get, however. Instead Pearl provides a lightweight hi-hat controller pedal that works with a pair of pads, albeit without any physical separating of the two when pedalled. As with all such arrangements, it takes some getting used to, given its lighter response than the real deal. But it holds its own with other similarly-styled offerings.

The drums themselves are also fairly hefty. Shells are those from Pearl's former Export Series and, once fitted with Pearl's Tru-Trac heads, they end up significantly heavier than your average drums. But they're not unwieldy and the pads themselves are confidence-inspiring in terms of build-quality and feel. Once installed, they look much like standard heads too, rather than space-age contraptions - which adds to the 'real instrument' feel nicely.

At the core of the kit is the 'r.e.d.' (real electronic drums) box of course, and this does look rather more space-age, albeit in a kind of retro way. It also looks, hmm, remarkably close to Alesis' DM10 module in fancier clothes. In fact, bar the aesthetics, ▶

From the Horse's Mouth!

Jeroen Breider **European Branding Manager,**
Pearl Music Europe BV

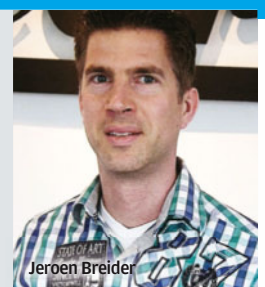
Are 'real shells' the result of requests from customers, or was it simpler to add electronic heads to an existing blueprint rather than design an e-kit from the ground up?

"The use of real shells was part of the e-Pro Live concept, and to set the kit apart from what's already on the market. We're an acoustic drum manufacturer and so we needed to make e-drums that look like acoustic drums. We think we've created e-drums that sound and feel like acoustic drums, therefore they need to look like acoustic drums as well!"

Do you get the feeling that many e-Pro customers will utilise the kit's ability to function as a regular acoustic kit as well as electronic?

"We offer the two-in-one as an extra feature, the customer will have the opportunity to use the kit electronic and acoustic, but foremost it will be used as an e-kit. The shells are the same as our Export series, so the acoustic drums sound really good."

Is there likely to be a subsequent model with more RAM to allow more than one



aftermarket kit to be loaded to the r.e.d. box anytime soon?

"In general, the memory switch is now made to upload one high definition kit, which you can purchase and download from our redboxsoundshop.com. We are looking into how to make some improvements to the kit, one of those could be extending the RAM of the module."

PEARL E-PRO LIVE



THE E-PRO LIVE

is available in Jet Black and this swanky Quilted Maple Fade. It's a wrap, but it does look ace.



THE RBM20 MODULE

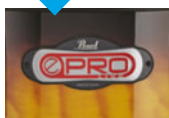
might not be new, but its update-ability with affordable third-party sounds adds real class.



THE TRU-TRAC HEADS

feel good, although they are a weighty assembly. The upside is a very sturdy chassis that should last and last.

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICES

£2,965 (£2,725 with rubber cymbals)

SOUNDS

1,000

KITS

100

PADS

Tru-Trac synthetic heads, E-Classic brass cymbals

FEATURES

128Mb flash memory, 6-ply acoustic shells

CONNECTIONS

12 trigger inputs, MIDI in and out, USB, Aux Ins, stereo outputs, auxiliary outputs

PLAYALONG TRACKS

28

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it's the same brain - a modest but decent performer that in its r.e.d. box guise can be installed with third party kits to give something of an upgraded aural experience.

Hands On

While myself and other electronic kit enthusiasts enjoy the view over a collection of pads and cymbal triggers, there remains something peculiarly enthralling about being sat behind a standard-sized set-up, with real-sized drums. Which is pretty much what you get with the e-Pro.

Debate about the merits or otherwise of rubber, mesh and new technology heads, like Yamaha's Textured Cellular Silicon, continues to rage and are subject to personal preferences, of course. But I have to say that I found Pearl's solution to the question of acoustic-ish response from trigger pads very appealing. Nothing exactly emulates the feel of a normal head, but these are comfortable, with excellent rebound and less of the pronounced bounce that you get with some mesh types. It's very much a case of trying before you buy, but I liked them.

I also prefer the bronze cymbals that Pearl has here to rubber cymbal pads. Again, they

offer only an approximation of real cymbal feel, but the bite of wood on metal provides that extra degree of familiar response over other options.

So the physical attributes of the e-Pro are largely on the money, but what of its beating heart, the RBM20 module? Well, it strikes a pretty decent balance between affordability and performance as standard, but harness

Things take a significant step up when the RBM's processing power is put to use on optional third-party kits

the power of internet-deliverable upgrades and it can really shine. The module comes equipped with 100 preset kits - some really rather good, others that didn't really blow me away. But the best of the acoustic types are decently 'three dimensional' and reasonably dynamic. Machine-gunning rolls are noticeable here and there, but not pronounced - and pick the right presets and snare drums will deliver everything from ghost notes to rimshots quite convincingly.

But things take a significant step up when the RBM's processing power is put to use on optional third-party kits, downloadable from www.redboxsoundshop.com. I was given

access to two Toontrack offerings - their Swedish Classic and Vibetastic kits - and although the difference between presets and 'installed' kits wasn't like black and white to colour TV, it wasn't far off the move from colour TV to high definition. The snare sound of the Vibetastic kit was immediately more biting and edgy and the toms fuller and more organic, providing an altogether more developed playing experience. If there's a downside, it's that installing one of these new kits takes all of the module's 128Mb memory so you can't have a choice of several installed.

So the e-Pro is good out of the box, potentially really very good with your choice of aftermarket sounds - and is also usable as an acoustic kit with regular heads. I only very briefly experimented with standard heads, and it's safe to say that Pearl's Reference customers probably won't have their ears swayed by the e-Pro, but it could prove a very useful option.

Verdict

This is evolution, not revolution. By using an existing module, but offering the opportunity to add your choice of (excellent) sounds from other developers, and by coming up with a real-looking and nice-feeling kit, Pearl may not have provided us with a game-changer, but the e-Pro is a great addition to the market. Those who have baulked at space-age pads until now should take particular note... **R**

Rating ★★★★★



TRY IT WITH...



A KIT FROM
www.redboxsoundshop.com - it really opens up the potential of the e-Pro Live.



REAL HEADS
If you want the best of both worlds, swap the Tru-Tracs for your fave heads.



AN MP3 PLAYER
in the Aux Ins - the internal playalong tracks are a bit on the clanky side.