

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

EVERYTHING FALLS TO HAND

easily and is slotted in close - but that means you have to concentrate on accuracy!

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most remarkable things about it**

ROLAND HD-1 ELECTRONIC DRUM KIT



£527.58 If smaller is often better in hi-tech circles, is that so for Roland's new HD-1? Jordan McLachlan finds out

THE BUILD QUALITY

is sufficient to assuage any fears that the HD-1 is only good for the odd tap-around

THE TACTILE RESPONSE

of the HD-1's playing surfaces is fantastic

SPRUNG UNITS

aren't as responsive as regular pedals, but this kind of compromise is to be expected in pursuit of compactness and wallet-friendliness

In the world of computer software, wherever there's a good product to be found there will (eventually) be a 'Lite' offshoot. Stripped of some of the more complex features of the full version, the Lites are conceived to hook punters into the line and deliver them, flapping with excitement, to the doors of local retailers a while later, begging to be sold the fully-featured product for several hundred pounds more. The reasoning is simple: give consumers a taste of what the product can do for them, dangle the carrot of extra functions, and watch them crack open the piggybank once they've exhausted the potential of the Liteware.

Roland's V-Drum line, while consisting of hardware products, is very much a range built on the capabilities of seriously hi-tech software. The mesh head pads and sexy tubular racks of gear like the TD-12K and TD-20K are all well and good, but without the processing power of the software within, they'd be a pretty but useless assemblage of rubber, nylon and metal.

Bearing in mind this reliance on boffin-created software, it's perhaps in keeping with the thinking of the day that Roland has recently come up with its first V-Drums Lite package. The HD-1 bears the slogan on its box

(so it's not just me poking fun) and the bijou little kit adheres closely to the ethos of the Lite world. Bereft of many of the features of the upscale V-Drum line, it still offers a teaser experience of the bigger TDs. The question, as with all such Lite gear, is whether it's a valid product in its own right, or a kit crippled by corners cut too far...

Build

Whatever the final verdict on the validity of the HD-1, there's no arguing that it's an impressively cute little thing. But it's cute in a serious rather than silly way. From the diminutive little module sited atop the compact silver rack to the pod-like pedal housings, there is (as with all V-Drum offerings) clear evidence of some heavy-duty design having been brought to bear on the new kit.

And while it might be Lite in nature, the HD-1 is no flimsy toy. In fact its solidity is one of the most remarkable things about it. Sure, it's not as stable as a full TD-20 rig, but the kit is heavy enough to stay put during use, and build quality (another Roland trademark) is sufficient to assuage any fears that it'll only be good for the occasional tap-around. Even the hi-hat and kick pedals - often the least

From the Horse's Mouth!

Hiroyuki Nishi: Roland Percussion Product Design

Did the design team face any particularly difficult challenges in translating the V-Drum 'concept' into such a compact and more affordable little package?

Yes, there were some difficulties: the basic design of the drum kit, including each pad and pedal, was a challenge. We also had to consider carefully how to keep the basic playability as an instrument while designing a 'new concept' drum kit for everybody.

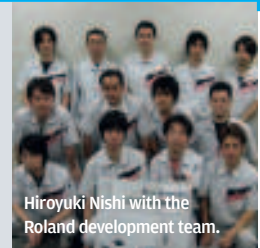
Finally, there was the issue of improving the acoustic noise of the tom pads and kick pedal. The final solution, of course,

was the cushioned tom pads and beater-less kick.

What aspects of the design of the kit and module are you particularly proud of?

I'm proud of the fact that we provided a new drum kit to the world that we have never seen before, and that we have a new, stylish design with two vertical pipes, which is patent pending. I'm also very proud that we managed to balance the specification to satisfy both drummers and non-drummers.

Was the primary aim to offer existing drummers a compact



Hiroyuki Nishi with the Roland development team.

practice kit, or to appeal to a 'lifestyle' audience who might not otherwise consider an electronic drum kit like the HD-1 for use at home?

Our original aim was to appeal to everybody!

We did not exclude existing drummers, because they could also use and enjoy the HD-1 in their home, and we are trying to have more non-drummers start drumming, instead of only dreaming of doing it.

ROLAND HD-1 ELECTRONIC DRUM KIT



THE HD-1 MODULE FEATURES

a neat SCART-style connector that does away with individual connections from the pads.



THE TENSIONABLE MESH

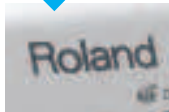
head snare pad is a welcome addition to the HD-1, allowing for a certain degree of tailoring to taste



THE ALL-NEW HD-1 RACK

is a great piece of design; compact, sturdy and good-looking, it'll fit in almost anywhere

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICE

£527.58

PADS

Mesh snare, rubber toms (x3), plastic/rubber cymbals (x3)

FEATURES

10 kits, built-in click, pattern preview

CONNECTIONS

MIDI out, headphone out (minijack), aux input (minijack)

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chunky aspects of more affordable e-kits – are metal, and the housings into which they fit are of the kind of high-impact plastic that's up to a beating. Not that that ever needs to happen.

The kit slots together easily and, once it's all in place, provides a decent balance between compactness and playing space. One of the very reasons for the HD-1's existence is to offer space-deprived drummers a kit that will fit into a corner, but there's enough scope for positioning the four drum and three cymbal pads that, unless you're of Peter Crouch-type dimensions, you shouldn't feel like a monkey perched behind a set of cotton reels.

And so to the pads themselves. And what a treat they are. A mesh head snare pad is accompanied by three cushioned rubber tom pads and a trio of cymbal pads with 'half rubber' playing surfaces. This arrangement makes for as quiet a playing experience as

with the V-Drum stuff so far will appreciate the forgiving nature of the snare pad, and the wrist-saving softness of the cushioned rubber toms is welcome too. The one aspect of the playing experience that does take some adjusting to is the pedal feel, as with all 'non-standard' pedal set-ups. There's no escaping the fact that sprung units like this can't offer the same feel and responsiveness as regular pedals. But as the one significant compromise in pursuit of compactness and wallet-friendliness, it's hardly a bridge too far.

There's no arguing that the HD-1 is an impressively cute little thing. But it's cute in a serious rather than silly way

You'll be expecting that downsized module (barely bigger than a video cassette) to prove limited compared to even the bigger TD-3 offering. And you'd be right. There's seemingly no way of squeezing tons of processing power into such a small unit. But the sounds that are contained within don't let the Roland side down. A couple each of pleasing acoustic 'rock' kits, electro ensembles (heavy on the 909/808 vibe), jazz-oriented sets and percussion groupings are presented within the choice of

just 10 preset kits. And the triggering abilities of the HD-1 mean that dual sounds (bow and bell on cymbals, edge and middle of head on drums, for instance) are within the unit's remit, making for a slightly more rewarding set-up than would otherwise be the case. A MIDI out socket also means the HD-1 can communicate with hardware better stocked with sounds, should you feel the need.

However, there's no editing as far as sounds go – what you're given is what you've got. In the main this is no great shame, because the sounds are very solid. But in some cases it would be useful to reduce reverb levels on the acoustic bass drums, or tune snares up for a tighter tone.

The HD-1 also does without the TD-3's excellent training features, so this is less of a learning tool than its bigger brother. There are no songs to play along to, no coaching functions to improve your chops with. There is, however, a click (although no bpm info), and you can plug an iPod/CD player in, too.

Verdict

The V-Drum line is essentially a premium series, so although this is the entry-level, the HD-1 was never likely to be a sub-£300 product. It has its limitations but it fulfils its brief as a super-compact, good-sounding practice set very well. Surprise at the price has to be balanced against the superb build quality and general design. **R**

Rating ★★★★★



possible – there's no escaping a dull thud from the pads (near-silent mesh head aside), but the acoustic response from the kit is as muted as Roland could make it.

Hands On

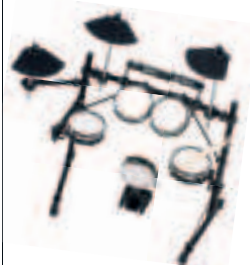
Playing the HD-1 is a rather different experience than sitting behind a more normal-sized electronic kit. But it's in no way unpleasant or uncomfortable, quite the contrary: everything falls to hand easily and the fact that everything's slotted in close actually means you have to concentrate on accuracy rather than flailing all over the place. Which is good for some of us.

And the tactile response of the playing surfaces is very good indeed. Those familiar

ALSO TRY...



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£450



ALESIS DM5 PRO
£399



YAMAHA DTXPLORER
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