

NEW GEAR

TAMA SUPERSTAR CUSTOM HYPERDRIVE KIT

From £849 Are small toms the next big thing? Tama thinks so. Geoff Nicholls tries the new Hyperdrive on for size

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICE

SL52HXZBNS (on review): 22"x20", 10"x6½", 12"x7", 16"x14", 13"x6" snare

£979
SX44HZBNS: 24"x18", 12"x7", 16"x14", 14"x6½" snare

£849

SK62HZBNS: 22"x18", 10"x6½", 12"x7", 14"x12", 16"x14", 14"x5½" snare

£899

SHELL MATERIAL

Birch/basswood mix

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Six-ply, 6mm (toms/snare); seven-ply, 7mm (bass drum)

BEARING EDGES

45 degrees

HOOPS

Star-Cast zinc die-moulded, finished in black nickel plate

SUPPLIED HEADS

Tama Powercraft

HARDWARE PACK

Road Pro hardware

SNARE WIRES

20-strand chrome-plated steel

CONTACT

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Tama's Superstar, first seen in 2005, sits in the middle of Tama's three main ranges - above the Imperialstar and below the Starclassic. There are, however, six Superstar variations, depending on finish and sizes. Three of these are the new Hyperdrives with shallow toms, the most expensive being the Custom Hyperdrive, with its lacquered fade finish.

Build

Superstar shells are a mix of birch and basswood. Birch forms the heart, with basswood used for the inner ply and outer lacquered veneer. Toms and snares are six-ply, 6mm while bass drums are seven-ply, 7mm. The basswood grain is not exactly memorable, but the outer gloss lacquer is flawless. A paper tag inside each shell proudly proclaims they are 'Handcrafted in China'.

Bearing edges are almost sharp enough to cut your finger, indicating a good, hard quality of wood. Edges have 45-degree cuts, peaking two thirds of the way into the shell - excellent edges for budget drums.

The big talking point is the shallow toms, which Tama calls 'Hyperdrive'. Instead of standard 10"x8", 12"x9" and 16"x16" you get 10"x6½", 12"x7" and 16"x14". Of course, when it comes to bass drums the opposite trend is still in force - this one's an 'Ultra Deep' 22"x20".

All shell hardware, including tension bolts, is finished in sexy black nickel. Unusually for today, the 'Sound Bridge' lugs are full length and bridged so that, like tube lugs, they only contact the shell at each end. This reduces stress, allowing for high tension while not constricting the shell.

The 22" kick has eight lugs rather than the 10 you'd expect on a professional drum. I doubt it makes much difference except to the fussiest of tuners, but it does remind you that the Superstar is a budget range. Metal rims are the same die-cast hoops featured on the pro Starclassic series. The insides of the hoops

are left half polished and surprisingly unsmooth, presumably another indication of cost-cutting.

Rack toms come complete with black Star-Cast isolation mounting brackets. These attach to special ears on the drum hoop and not to the tension rods as with some systems. This keeps tuning and mounting operations apart, which must be a good thing.

The Hyperdrive comes with an excellent, full Road-Pro hardware package. Top toms are mounted from cymbal stands via multi-clamps so the bass drum remains un-drilled. The shallow tom depths make positioning easier if you like low-slung toms.

Hands On

As you'd expect, the overriding sonic feature is punchiness. The combination of birch - the 'focused' timber - shallow sizes and die-cast hoops makes the small toms extremely tight, fast and attacking. In fact, playing rim shots off the die-cast tom hoops is almost timbalesque.

There's no loss of power, but there is inevitably less bottom. Personally I think this is a smart direction. Drummers play so hard now and they're often mic'ed, so you simply don't need the full-fat boom of traditional toms. How many of us have been to concerts where the hi-hat and snare cut through, the bass drum is clicked to the max, then the drummer goes round the toms and... nothing - the drums disappear. Topy, shallow toms are one solution.

The drums are fitted with Tama Powercraft 250 batter heads. These are made by Evans, and the batters at least are proper Mylar, equivalent to Evans twin-ply G2s. The bottoms are single ply. With some playing in, the heads sounded fine - obviously, you can change to pro heads later. I found the shallow shells easier to tune than normal sizes. There are fewer overtones to complicate matters and you can quickly go low or high with equally workable results. I never liked power toms

THE BASS DRUM

is ultra deep, weighing in at 22"x20"

much but I think I may be a convert to shallow ones. There's now a Hyperdrive 14"x8" (though not with this kit), the size Premier was lambasted for and yet which Keith Moon sounded so fantastic on...

By contrast, the bass and snare are both relatively deep. The snare is 13"x6", and the loss of an inch in diameter means a snappier attack, while the 6" depth results in some boxiness. With the die-cast rims there's a finality about the rim shots - an abrupt 'clat' and short sustain. Not bad, but I wasn't knocked out.

The bass drum's uncut black logo head looks good, but with a drum this size many buyers will cut a porthole. I swapped for a front head with standard 5" offset hole and it made a big difference, giving the edge to counteract the massive rumble generated by





HYPERDRIVE TOMS
are distinctly shallow

A ROAD-PRO
hardware package is
supplied with the kit

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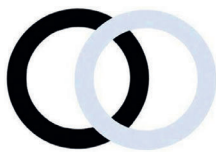
such a large internal volume. I felt happiest with a deep/loose batter, when the tone was thunderous but controlled.

Verdict

Tama has its finger on the pulse with this one. It's relatively cheap because it's birch/basswood and made in China. But don't let that put you off. It's a cracking kit with great features. Shallow toms are not new (but then what is?) - Louie Bellson had them in the 1940s and Noble and Cooley reintroduced them in the 1980s. But it seems that now their time has really come. Expect every other manufacturer to follow suit. Next, surely, it's the turn of these monster bass drums to be cut down to size. 22"x12" anyone? **R**

Rating ★★★★★

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