

GRETSCH USA STANDARD KIT

From £599 Gretsch's US drums are now within reach

WORDS: ADAM JONES

The USA Standard range provides a quicker and cheaper route to owning a set of Gretsch's prestigious American-made drums. The brainchild of Nick Moulin at Fender UK, USA Standard is exclusive to Europe.

Build

Gretsch is a global brand that produces kits at most price points and has manufacturing bases spread around the world. It is also a company with a remarkable heritage that

fast-track process that limits the options without compromising the quality or integrity of the drums. Launched at this year's Frankfurt MusikMesse, the range consists of three shellpacks available in a choice of six finishes.

Gretsch has manufactured batches of all of the components, so USA Standard kits are effectively stock items with a typical wait of no more than a few days from ordering to delivery. They're also a good 25 percent cheaper than an equivalent USA Custom kit. As the range is limited strictly to the stated

GRETSCH MAINTAINS THE SHELLS ARE NEAR IDENTICAL TO THOSE PRODUCED HALF A CENTURY AGO

stretches back to the 19th Century, to the dawn of commercial drum manufacturing as we know it today. Without dismissing Gretsch's excellent affordable kits that are made elsewhere, US-manufactured drums are what Gretsch's reputation has been built on. The slogan 'That Great Gretsch Sound' says it all, and a roll-call of drumming greats from the past 100 years finds a significant proportion of them plying their trade behind a Gretsch kit. So if American Gretsch drums have a certain cachet to them, it's not without good reason.

Until now, the only way of acquiring a Gretsch USA Custom kit involved a wait of up to four months while Gretsch's small, close-knit workforce in South Carolina made the drums to order. USA Standard has been devised as a

shellpack and finish options, any extra drums would have to be ordered via the USA Custom route, with its higher costs and protracted delivery time.

The three shellpacks are made up of toms and bass drums only, and cover jazz (18"x14", 12"x8" and 14"x14"), fusion (20"x16", 10"x7", 12"x8" and 14"x14") and rock (22"x18", 10"x7", 12"x8", 16"x16"). This last kit was the example sent for review. Snares are ordered separately from a choice of 14"x5½" or 14"x6½" models, of which *Rhythm* received the deeper version.

USA Standard drums are made in exactly the same way as USA Custom drums, and have the same level of care and attention to detail lavished on them. Gretsch's celebrated six-ply maple shell formula - which has barely changed since the late 1950s - is

BEARING EDGES

Gretsch's standard 30° bearing edges are cut by hand on a vintage routing table

BASS DRUM HOOPS

Shimmering pearl inlay adds a touch of glamour to the bass drum hoops





SOUND

Thin shells and thin heads combine to great effect to produce an open feel on the toms

SHELLS

USA Standard drums feature the same 6-ply maple shell recipe that made Gretsch famous

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICE

Gretsch USA Standard kit (as reviewed), from £599

SHELL MATERIAL

Maple

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Ply

NUMBER OF PLYS

Six

BEARING EDGES

30°

FINISHES AVAILABLE

Nitron wraps: Champagne Sparkle; Sky Blue Pearl; Nitro Cellulose satin lacquer: Classic Natural; Walnut (as pictured); Nitro Cellulose gloss lacquer: Dark Ebony; Burnt Orange

HOOPS/RIMS

Die-cast on toms and snare; matching wood hoops on bass drum

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Three shellpacks: 12"x8"/14"x14"/18"x14"; 10"x7"/12"x8" tom/14"x14" floor tom, 20"x16", 10"x7" tom, 12"x8" tom, 16"x16", 22"x18"; two snares: 14"x5½" & 14"x6½" (other drums only available on a custom-ordered basis)

SUPPLIED HEADS

Toms & snare: coated Gretsch Permatone batters and clear Gretsch Permatone resonants; bass drum: coated Gretsch Permatone batter and coated Gretsch front head

LUGS PER DRUM

10" & 12" toms: 10; 16" floor tom: 16; 14" snare: 10 double-ended lugs; 22" bass drum: 20

TOM MOUNTS

Gretsch GTS suspension mounts, stand mounted

SNARE STRAINER

Dunnett R40 throw off and butt end

SNARE WIRES

Gretsch branded, 20 wires

CONTACT

Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.gretschdrums.com

They say...

Nik Williams Divisional Sales Manager – Percussion, Fender Great Britain & Ireland



Where did the idea for the USA Standard spring from?

"Customers have been feeding back to us that they love the sound of Gretsch USA Custom drums but couldn't quite afford to buy them. By offering a limited number of finishes and configurations, plus saving on logistics from the USA, we have been able to cut a significant amount off a USA kit and bring it in line with, or even below our competitors."

Would you be able to tell the difference between USA Custom and Standard?

"Absolutely not - the shells, finishes, hardware, badges, everything is lifted from the same Gretsch USA formula that has been used since the 1950s."

What has the reaction been like so far?

"We have been surprised by the support dealers have shown, and hopefully we'll get a similar reaction from the drumming fraternity. The way we produce drums means we can react really quickly to shifts in popularity of sizes and finishes, and if this first incarnation goes well, we'll change the configurations and colours next time."



FINISH

Perfectly-executed Satin Walnut finish is one of six available

HEADS

Coated Remo Ambassadors are rebadged as Gretsch Permatone

employed across the kit. In a market filled with manufacturers offering new and more radical shell-construction techniques, it's refreshing to find a shell that epitomises the adage 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

The key word in the shell description is 'formula', which hints at both a particular method and possibly another ingredient. There has long been speculation that Gretsch shells sound like they do because somewhere among the maple lie other plies of a different wood. Gretsch refuses to be drawn on the subject, and why should it? As the shells are so central to the Gretsch sound, the company

Hands On

The six USA Standard finishes comprise two Nitron wraps (Sky Blue Pearl and Vintage Champagne), two Nitro-Cellulose gloss lacquers (Dark Ebony and Burnt Orange) and a pair of Nitro-Cellulose satin lacquers (Classic Natural and Walnut). Applying Nitro-Cellulose lacquer is a painstaking process that takes between two-and-a-half and three weeks to complete. Each coat is applied by hand, as is the subsequent sanding between each coat. Such thorough preparation makes for an unbeatable finish, and the Satin Walnut of the review kit is a lesson in understated beauty.

whenever he stepped too close.

A similarly open feel is present in the toms, with the thin shells and thin heads combining to great effect. The die-cast hoops help them cut through without encroaching on the warm notes that follow. Plenty of woody body is present too, thanks to the 30° bearing edges. Fills between the toms and bass drum bring to mind Roger Taylor in all his majestic glory.

The snare gave an equally impressive performance, being as tonally distinct as the other drums and just as capable in the volume stakes. Sensitivity is excellent, and the spread of dynamics it offers indicates a seriously versatile drum. From pulsating rimshots to shivering brushwork - and all stations in between - it reproduced everything faithfully.

Gretsch drums are manufactured by a small, loyal workforce which refuses to divulge build-secrets, which further heightens their allure. The USA Standard range, made to the same specification as all Gretsch drums by the same people in the same factory, means the possibility of owning a bona fide US-made Gretsch kit, with all of the heritage that comes with it, is now open to more drummers. **R**

BASS DRUM WAS FAT, CENTRED AND POWERFUL, EACH STROKE CREATING RIPPLES IN THE SINGER'S TROUSER LEG

would have an understandable desire to keep the details secret. Suffice to say Gretsch maintains that the shells are near-identical to those produced half a century ago. Bearing edges are cut at Gretsch's regular 30° on all of the drums, including the snare. The process of cutting the bearing edges is done by hand on a vintage routing table and is the responsibility of two longstanding employees.

Gretsch's fabled Silver Sealer coats the inside of the shells, while die-cast hoops are fitted to the toms and snare. Bass drums come with matching wooden hoops, with the review drum's hoops having an additional pearl inlay. The bass drum also features new die-cast claws, which offer more protection to the hoop than the model they replace.

Coated Remo Ambassadors, rebadged as Gretsch Permatone, are found on the snare and toms, while the bass drum sports a Gretsch logo'd coated Powerstroke. The first thing that struck me was the openness of the kit's sound - the drums singing without restraint. The bass drum almost strays into uninhibited territory. At 22"x18" with no dampening - other than the thin ring in the Powerstroke head - it delivers a colossally deep thud that is in no hurry to decay. In the marquee in which I gigged with the kit - normally a flat acoustic environment - the kick sounded live and resonant. Eventually a minimal amount of external muffling had to be applied to make the drum mic-able. Tonally it was fat, centred and powerful, with each stroke creating ripples in the singer's trouser legs

Also try...



1

DW JAZZ SERIES

We say: "Jazz is warm, punchy, more resonant and more suitable for high jazz tunings."



2

LUDWIG CLASSIC MAPLE

We say: "All-American, all-maple kit from a brand equally steeped in drum history."

VERDICT Gretsch drums are renowned for their unique sound and charismatic design, and the USA Standard range makes them more accessible without demystifying the brand.

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
PLAYABILITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
RHYTHM RATING ★★★★★