

YAMAHA ABSOLUTE HYBRID MAPLE SERIES KIT

From £494 Award-winning next step in Yamaha's long-standing mission to make the most cutting-edge production drum kits in the world

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

Exciting times for Yamaha's drum division as it continues to drive innovation in drumset development, just as it always has. Over in China, Yamaha has gradually expanded its state-of-the-art, highly eco-conscious guitar, piano and wind instrument production since 1997. In July 2013 a long-held plan to develop a similarly cutting-edge drum facility was realised with a 200,000sq ft factory, Xiaoshan Yamaha, in Hangzhou, near Shanghai. Yamaha tested the water with the Custom Live (*Rhythm*, August 2013) and now proudly presents the fourth generation Absolute series, the Absolute Hybrid Maple.

Build

It really feels like Yamaha has embarked on a new era with this kit, there are so many purposeful innovations. First though, everything rests on the shell construction and the manner of this is something Yamaha had from the very first days, back in 1967. In fact, by a genuine coincidence, the kit featured in this month's Vintage Gear is a 1960s Yamaha and an examination of its shells reveals the staggered diagonal seams which are still the foundation of Yamaha's methodology.

join. Thus these shells could be made thinner without the need for reinforcing rings. Other companies eventually followed suit, but Yamaha was first.

However, Absolute Hybrid Maple takes another leap forward because of the constitution of the shells, which follows from the flagship Phoenix PHX series. Hybrid Maple shells consist of seven plies: paired maple plies inside and out, with a core triple sandwich of maple-wenge-maple. Wenge is a particularly hard, dark African wood, often used in guitar manufacture. Indeed, it was the ability to draw on the company's expertise in guitar and piano making etc that enabled the drum division to move forward. Yamaha UK's Gavin Thomas explains that, "We found with the Phoenix that the majority of the sound vibrations come from the central ply. So [with the Absolute Hybrid] we wanted



FINISH

Finishes include the Red Autumn lacquer of the review kit, while inside the shells have a protective vintage finish

insides of the shells are also coated with a vintage finish for a fraction more warmth. Outside there's a wide selection of colours and sparkles. It goes without saying the review kit in Red Autumn lacquer is flawlessly presented.

Next come the hook lugs, which were also originally designed for the PHX. The squared brackets hook over single posts and just by loosening each lug bolt a few turns the lugs come free and the whole hoop lifts off. Hook lugs offer a viable alternative solution for

**WITH THE WHOLE KIT SET UP,
THE FIRST TIME I RATTLE ROUND
THE FOUR TOMS - WOAH! THE
WHOLE ROOM SHAKES**

In layering-up plies in a shell mould, historically seams would be vertically butted up, or overlapped, tapered and scarfed. But in 1967, following the Japanese principle of *kashikomi*, Yamaha introduced staggered diagonal seams. So when the air bag is inserted, putting pressure on the shell internally, the seams push down and out into the mould, creating a perfect extra-stable

a dense musical wood with lots of resonance, [wenge] creating the majority of the tone and then softer wood [maple] outside to help that resonance - as it goes further out and loses energy it has less to push through."

Shells have 'optimised' bearing edges, 45° on toms and snare, 30° on bass drums. They are supremely finished and level. The

TOM BRACKETS

YESS III tom brackets have absolutely no metal-to-wood contact. The rubber gasket is Japanese 'bullet train'-quality rubber



SNARE

14"x6" snare has 3mm aluminium die-cast hoops, 20 hook lugs, new piston strainer and 2.7mm snare beds

Essential spec



PRICES

Review kit: 22"x18" bass drum, £1,218; 10"x7", 12"x8", 16"x15" tom pack, £1,418; 14"x13" floor tom, £573; 14"x6" snare drum, £494

SHELL MATERIAL

Maple-wenge-maple hybrid

HOOPS

3mm aluminium die-cast

PLIES

Bass drum: 8mm, 7 plies; toms and snare: 6.2mm, 7 plies

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Toms: 8"x7", 10"x7", 10"x8", 12"x8", 12"x9", 14"x9", 13"x10", 14"x12", 16"x14"; floor toms: 14"x13", 16"x15", 18"x16"; Bass drums: 18"x14", 20"x16", 22"x14", 22"x16", 22"x18", 24"x14", 24"x16"

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo

LUGS

Hook lug, originally designed for PHX Series

TOM MOUNTS

YESS III Mount System. Hinged floor tom leg brackets; low-mass bass drum tom bracket

SNARE STRAINER

New Yamaha piston-drive strainer with Yamaha 25-coil high carbon steel and 2.7mm snare bed

CONTACT

Yamaha Music GmbH (UK)
0844 811116
<http://uk.yamaha.com>



nifty head changes, and despite the inherent conservatism of drummers, Yamaha has long persevered with them.

Up to now Yamaha would have planted the single posts right at the nodal points of the shell, precisely 22.4 percent of the way from top and bottom edges. At these points of minimal resonance the mounting posts interfere least with shell resonance.

BEARING EDGES

Shells have 'optimised' bearing edges, 30° on the bass drum, supremely finished and level

GEAR REVIEW

They say...

Gavin Thomas is the UK Product Manager for Yamaha Drums



Gavin, the Absolute Hybrid Maple shows Yamaha continuing at the cutting edge.

"We have just spent \$10million on a new factory in Hangzhou, two hours from Shanghai, China. No one else is doing that in the drum industry."

This is a serious high-end kit.

"Where the first kit from the factory, the Live Custom, was all about power, punch and live playing, this is more about expression and tonal dynamics. What we wanted was to create a really resonant sound with a wide spectrum of tonal qualities. Good for lighter, sensitive playing, but it has power as well and does not choke whatsoever."

What is the background?

"The idea came through from the Phoenix, where we wanted to push the envelope in terms of how the instrument works. Yamaha thinks futuristically, always trying to improve the instrument. We also have guitar and piano divisions etc, and people who look after manufacturing and materials, and we went to them to find new materials with different qualities. This is all about being innovative and creating the most resonant drum."



ABSOLUTE

Absolute Hybrid Maple is the fourth generation of Yamaha's Absolute series

SHELLS

Shells are a 7-ply hybrid of North American maple with a single inner core ply of extra-hard and resonant African wenge

However, Gavin reveals that Yamaha has taken another step, pinpointing unwanted shell frequencies. So the lugs are actually mounted slightly beyond the nodal points, effectively to 'eq' the drum.

Next, the tom holders, where we find the third generation YESS system (the first came in 1993). Where earlier YESS brackets were attached just at the top, this has an additional fixing point at the bottom. Despite appearances there is no shell-to-metal contact whatsoever. The mounting plate is attached to the shell by special grommets of extremely high-grade rubber,

THE ISOLATION OF THE YESS MOUNTS IS SO EFFECTIVE AND THE BASS DRUM YIELDS SO MUCH 'OOMPH', THERE'S NO INDICATION OF ITS BEING CONSTRICTED

as used on Japan's 'bullet' train. The grommet passes through the shell and is fixed on the inside and outside by two quite separate screws which make no contact. The result is that the tom is held just by the flexible high-grade rubber and is free to bounce around a little.

There is a single snare drum with a 14"x6" shell and 20 hook lugs. It's fitted with Yamaha's new piston strainer, seen previously on the Live Custom, an admirably chunky device which inspires confidence. Attached by cords are

Yamaha's own 25-strand high carbon steel snare wires.

Hands On

With the whole kit set up, the first time I rattle round the four toms - woah! the whole room shakes. As for the bass drum, it's a real chest thumper. With a firm mid-tuning, there is so much depth and rounded tone. Though Yamaha is keen to push the broad ranging tonal sensitivity of the drums, this is also undoubtedly one of the most lively of kits.

To gauge the impact of all those technical resonance innovations, I mount my own

1982 RC9000 (birch) 10"x8" tom on a dual stand next to the Maple Hybrid 10"x7". The RC has a birch shell with a pre-YESS clamp, so you'd expect a difference, but what I hear is dramatic. The RC produces a (beautiful) focused tone, a fast peak and good sustain. The Hybrid has much more sustain and of a quite different kind. After the initial impact and momentary lull the note seems to amplify, to stretch out and grow, before slowly petering out. It's an all-round fuller sound with a more complex tone.

At Gavin's suggestion I also put my foot on

Also try...



1 SJC CUSTOM HYBRID SHELL KIT

We say: "With the truest shells and the silkiest bearing edges I have seen in a long while, SJC proves its commitment to quality."



2 DW ECO-X PROJECT SERIES

We say: "An impressive set of drums, with the added bonus of being environmentally sound."

the tripod of the dual tom stand. With the RC you could feel the vibrations - the energy lost through the stand. But with the Absolute tom (and YESS III) the energy is released through the shell, you don't feel any dissipation through the stand.

Maybe paradoxically, there's no problem with the small toms being mounted off the bass drum. The isolation of the YESS mounts is so effective and the bass drum yields so much 'oomph', there is no indication of its being constricted at all.

The aluminium die-cast hoops really come into their own with the snare drum. Being lightweight but solid they give the drum bright and ringy rim-shots and cross-sticks with just the right mixture of clang and sweet tone. Like the toms the snare is resonant and expressive, crisp but with a fat tone, never losing that softer warm tinge of wood, sounding equally good whether tuned for heavy slogging or nimble skittering. **R**

VERDICT: Calling on expertise in various areas of instrument manufacture, the Absolute Hybrid Maple exemplifies Yamaha's pursuit of excellence. Extending boundaries on several levels, this is a beautifully designed, versatile sounding kit.

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