

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

**CLEAR
AMBASSADORS**
come as standard for
the top and bottom
tom heads



Within just a few minutes of liberating the drums from their cardboard prison I'd discovered a versatile, user friendly kit

PEARL MASTERS CUSTOM MCX KIT



THE KIT DOESN'T include a snare, although matching wood snares are available

BASS DRUM CLAWS and the kit's lugs boast rubber isolation gaskets

From £1,898 Geoff Nicholls asks if Pearl's upgrade from the Session series is a worthy addition to the Masters Custom

Pearl has always produced one of the widest ranges of any of the top manufacturers. While this is admirable it can also be confusing, and it's not helped by Pearl giving its series obscure titles like 'MMP' or 'SBX'. Now, here's the 'MCX'. 'MC' equals Masters Custom, and I don't know about the 'X', but the drums are maple.

The Masters series is a professional range that slots in above Pearl's starter Forum and budget Vision lines. However, it's not quite so luxurious as either the mega-bucks Reference or Masterworks.

Build

MCX replaces the Session series and is a sort of bargain basement version of the already established Masters Custom Premium. The reason for this is that the MCX is available only as six-ply maple, in a limited range of sizes and just five finishes. The Premium, though, is made with two shell choices: six-ply (like the MCX) or four-ply with reinforcing rings, both in maple or birch.

Our review kit is 22"x18", 10"x8", 12"x9" and 14"x14". There's no snare drum, although you can buy a matching wood 14"x5½" or 6½". Two other four-shell packs are offered, and you can buy extra drums individually.

MCX shells are Pearl's trusty 7.5mm six-ply maple. 7.5mm is a little thicker and heavier than many top-end drums these days. The result should be to make the shells stronger

and heavier, and also a fraction louder and brighter.

Looking inside the shells, you'll notice that Pearl's are slightly different from most others in that they have traditional, overlapped scarf joints. All the review shells were perfectly round and between 1 and 3mm undersized, allowing a bit of clearance for the head collar. The sharp bearing edges have a 45-degree cut right up to the outermost ply, with just the last ply routed over. They're among the best finished I've seen, absolutely smooth and flat.

The review kit is finished in a luxurious Delmar bronze glitter wrap. There are two other wraps and two lacquer finishes also available. This is a much narrower choice than the 30 Masters Premium finishes, but it means that the MCX is more readily available in the shops, whereas the Premium is special order. Certainly the review kit looked fantastic, and if you like one of the five finishes you could save 20 percent on the equivalent Masters Premium.

The two small toms are mounted via Pearl's OptiMount isolation brackets, a particularly sturdy system that grips both top and bottom lugs yet is still quite unobtrusive. Combined with the thick shells and die-cast hoops, it makes the drums noticeably heavier than some others. For example, on my bathroom scales the 10"x8" was 31kg while my Yamaha 9000 10"x8" (with no isolation bracket) was 25kg. Every detail of the build should bring a smile ▶

From the Horse's Mouth!

Mark De Cloedt: Marketing and Artist Relations Manager, Pearl Drums UK

What's the difference between this MCX and the Masters Premium?

If I put a blindfold over you and put the MCX next to the Masters Premium, you wouldn't hear any difference. The difference is in the grade of wood. All the lacquered kits in the Premium series have Grade A maple on the outside, with no knots. You have to root through a lot of wood to find the A grade. The MCX has B-class maple. Then

there are extra coats of paint and more buffing stages with the Premium. And the zinc in the cast metal work is of a slightly higher quality.

What heads do you prefer on the MCX toms?

For me, Emperor Clears, without a doubt. They bring out the warmth of the shell with a little bit more control and depth. Single-ply heads might have a bit too much projection.



Mark passes on Pearl's MCX wisdom

A snare drum is not included in the shell packs...

Normally with this level of kit guys already have a wealth of snares, so we decided not to include one in the shell pack. There are two MCX snares, available, however, and they are both the standard, matching six-ply models."

PEARL MASTERS CUSTOM (MCX) KIT



THE VINTAGE DELMAR SPARKLE

wrap in Bronze Glass is one of five MCX finishes available



THE TWO SMALL TOMS

have OptiMount brackets mounted on the bass drum



THE REMO POWERSTROKE HEADS

on the bass drum come intact - but Remo's supplied Dynamo template allows you to cut a hole in the front logo head if desired

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICE

22x18, 12x9, 13x10, 16x16 £2010

22x18, 10x8, 12x9, 14x14 £1934

20x18, 10x8, 12x9, 14x14 £1898

SHELL MATERIAL

Maple

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Pearl's SST Superior Shell Technology

NUMBER OF PLYS

Six-ply 7.5mm

BEARING EDGES

45 degrees onto the outer ply with 45-degree inner roll over

FINISHES

Super High Gloss Lacquer in Black Silk or Chestnut Fade, Delmar Sparkle covering in Bronze (as pictured), Red or Pewter Glass

HOOPS/RIMS

MasterCast 2.3mm die-cast hoops

SUPPLIED HEADS

Toms: Remo Clear Ambassador; bass drum: Powerstroke-3

LUGS PER DRUM

Single-ended Masters Bridge lugs - bass drum, 20; floor tom, 16; small toms 12

TOM MOUNTS

Bass drum mounted with Pearl OptiMount suspension system for small toms

CONTACT

Website
www.pearldrums.com

to your face. MasterCast die-cast hoops and Masters Bridge lugs are beautifully chromed. All lugs and bass drum claws have rubber isolation gaskets, the lugs have brass threaded inserts and the stainless steel tension rods have white nylon washers. The bass drum hoop has a steel plate for scratch-free pedal mounting. Finally, there's a full compliment of 20 lugs on the 22" kick, whereas the previous Session series had 16.

Hands On

Setting up is simple, as all the drums arrive pre-assembled with factory-tensioned Remo heads. The OptiMount brackets on the small toms are also fitted and ready to go - it's just a matter of sliding them onto the familiar twin arm bass drum mount. These days, toms are more often mounted on stands, but I'm happy with this old-school method - it's more stable and I like the way the sounds of the three drums intermingle and warm one another. Many drummers don't, of course, in which case you can always use stands, although that would leave you with a bass drum fitted with a superfluous tom mounting block. On this relatively heavy 7.5mm shell, I don't think it makes any great difference. Again, if you want an un-drilled six-ply kick you're back in special-order Masters Premium territory.

Toms are fitted with clear Ambassadors, top and bottom, which arrive tensioned right up high, giving a real jazzy ping. The rather thick shells and die-cast hoops accentuate this

focused, tight sound and (perhaps with a smaller kick) you'd have a great small jazz set.

Taking a half turn off top and bottom heads brought the toms into more of a fusion tuning, still with easily definable pitches, but punchier with a touch more sustain. Decay is nicely controlled and there's no need for even the slightest slither of Moongel. Backing off a half turn further we're into the rock and dirty funk area, and still the die-cast hoops and thick shells hold the tuning and keep the sound under control. There's no lack of ambience, but no wild, discordant humming either.

The bass drum comes with both heads intact

Every detail of the build should bring a smile to your face

and again tuned high. Pearl supplies a Remo Dynamo circular template so that you can cut a 5" hole in the black front logo head. I imagine most customers will do that sooner or later but, personally, when playing un-mic'ed small gigs recently, I'm happy leaving both heads intact. I remove the front head, loosely secure a Dave Weckl sausage dog cushion against the batter, replace the resonant and bash away. With the Remo Powerstroke, the sound is quite hard and bangy, not too boomy, even with this minimal damping. For a warmer, fatter sound I'd use an Aquarian SuperKick but, as with the toms, I soon found the kick is readily controlled with

good definition. So, to go through the tuning stages again: starting with the tight factory-tuned kick batter you have more of a big band jazz sound. This time I slacked off by three or four half turns until reaching the point just above wrinkle-free. I returned the front head to a full turn above that, around medium tension, to brighten the resonance. The result was a good mix of attack and depth with warm tone but not too much boom or low-end rumble.

I was chuffed that within just a few minutes of liberating the drums from their cardboard prison I'd discovered a versatile, user-friendly kit. Maybe it does not have quite the depth or sustain of the four-ply Premium, but it's all the more manageable and easy to mic because of that. A workhorse, touring kit for most styles of player. Pearl to the core.

Verdict

You'd be hard pushed to find a better presented, off-the-shelf mass produced pro kit than this. It looks terrific, with Pearl's deserved reputation for attention to small details. Size options are limited but should satisfy 90 percent of users so, if you're taken with one of the five finishes, you're onto a winner.

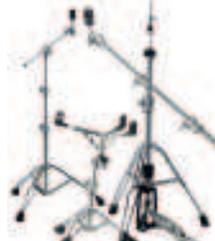
It's a bit heavy and the relatively thick shells might not be everyone's ideal. With the weighty die-cast hoops the result is a bright, tight, efficient sound, but there's still the warmth and clout of maple. Tuning is particularly stress free, given the exemplary bearing edges. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

TRY IT WITH...



MATCHING 14"x5½"
or 14"x6½" MCX snare
(Delmar Red Sparkle)



HARDWARE
such as Pearl's 1000 series
models



REMO EMPEROR
tom batters to bring out
more depth and warmth