

# MAPEX SATURN V TOUR EDITION SERIES



**£1,704** Mapex's long-running favourite Saturn series gets a special Touring Edition with classic dimensions and hard-wearing wrap finishes

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**T**he Mapex Saturn V Tour Edition was unveiled at Winter NAMM 2017 and brought to market that spring. The evolution of the Saturn series goes back decades, but for our purposes the build-up to the present kit stems from 2015 and the Saturn V Exotic Edition. This upped the ante with new lacquer finishes and, significantly, the introduction of Mapex's SoniClear concept, which covers bearing edges, suspension mounts and floor tom legs. Korg/Mapex UK's Sales Manager Duncan Williams, who is unravelling this evolution exclusively for *Rhythm*, explains that the Tour Edition followed in 2016, "in response to rising consumer and artist requests for one-up/one-down kits with shallow, more traditional bass drum depths and robust, road-tough finishes". In other words, in response to the retro trend for 1960/70s sizes with plastic wraps that are less susceptible to nasty scratches than expensive lacquer finishes.

## Build

"We had a raft of options on the wraps we could have selected during the design phase," Duncan expands, "but ended up with four classic finishes as they felt like a natural fit for the configurations and sizes we were working with". So, our review kit is in White Marine, while the other three options are Black Strata Pearl, Vintage (gold) Sparkle and Black Pearl.

Along with the select wrap options, there are three basic shell packs. And these really

are classics: 20"x14", 12"x8", 14"x14"; 22"x16", 12"x8", 16"x16"; and 24"x14", 13"x9", 16"x16" (illustrated). Other than the 16" deep 22" bass drum, that trio is straight out of a 1960s/1970s catalogue.

There's just the one 14"x6" matching wood snare (also pictured), Mapex recognising that drummers at this level will likely already have a couple of favourite gigging snares anyway. Two further tom sizes - 10"x7" and 18"x16" - are offered as add-ons.

So it's a focused range, which keeps the costs down, Mapex maintaining its reputation for value. As for the shells themselves, they're maple with an inner lining of walnut and are admirably thin. Toms and snares are 5.1mm, 4-ply maple with 2-ply walnut, while bass drums are 7.5mm consisting of 6-ply maple with 2-ply walnut. Walnut is a longstanding Mapex flagship, singling the company out from others. It's an attractive wood with the insides of these shells a warm brown.

In order to extract the maximum impact from these shells Mapex has developed its SoniClear concept. Starting with the bearing edges these are the usual 45° but with an increased round-over to the outside. This means more of the head's collar is in contact with the wood shell. Mapex makes great claims for this, but really it's a small thing. It's a bridge between the bearing edges of old, which were often completely rounded (including the reinforcing rings when they had them), and the bearing edges of modern times, which are mostly cut sharply, usually at

45° with a smaller round-off or counter-cut to the outside. With the Saturn shells being so thin there's little difference from other good shells. What is more important is the accuracy of the cut - and these are fine.

Both bass drums and small rack toms are left undrilled with regard to tom mounts. Our 13"x9" tom has a SoniClear tom bracket which, in a desire to be less obtrusive, is attached to just two upper lugs, not four. But as Yamaha found some years ago, this necessitates a third stabilising point positioned at the bottom of the 'T' bracket, in the form of a rubber bumper, which loosely pushes against the shell.

Thus, as with every other company's isolation mount, it's a compromise. But Mapex does have another tweak up its sleeve. The twin points of attachment do not encircle the actual tension bolts, but instead are screwed into the bottom of the two lugs. This is cute, since (using a drum key) the whole bracket can be removed quickly without disturbing the tuning lugs or top batter head. And if you decided to sit the tom on a snare stand instead you can remove the SoniClear mount entirely in seconds.

The SoniClear concept covers the floor tom legs also, which have large rubber feet with a shock-absorbing and resonance-isolating ribbed design.

Mapex has even taken a look at the bass drum spurs and decided to calibrate them. Thus the Memory Mark spurs have calibrations for the angle of rotation forward and for the length of spur you let



**MODERN SHELL MANUFACTURE  
MEANS YOU CAN HAVE THIN SHELLS  
LIKE THE SATURNS THAT ARE  
STRONG BY VIRTUE OF USING  
THINNER PLIES AND MORE OF THEM**

## CLASSIC SIZES

Retro sizes are back in fashion along with one-up and one-down toms. The review set has a 24"x14" bass drum



## MEMORY MARK BASS DRUM SPURS

Getting your bass drum to sit level is made easy by using the calibration marks for spur angle and length of protrusion

## Essential spec



### PRICES

20"x14", 12"x8", 14"x14":  
£1,259.99; 22"x16",  
12"x8", 16"x16": £1,319.99;  
24"x14", 13"x9", 16"x16"  
(pictured): £1,379.99;  
14"x6" snare (pictured):  
£323.99; Add-ons -  
10"x7": £215.99; 14"x14":  
£359.99; 18"x16": £407.99

### SHELL MATERIAL

Maple and walnut  
hybrid ply

### CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Toms and snare:  
2-ply walnut,  
plus 4-ply maple;  
Bass drums: 2-ply  
walnut, plus 6-ply maple

### NUMBER OF PLYS AND SHELL THICKNESS

Toms and snare: 6-ply,  
5.1mm thick; Bass drums:  
8-ply, 7.5mm thick

### BEARING EDGES

SoniClear 45° with  
outer round-over

### FINISHES AVAILABLE

Four wraps: Black Strata  
Pearl, Vintage Sparkle,  
White Marine (as  
pictured), Black Pearl

### HOOPS

2.3mm chromed steel  
power hoops

### INDIVIDUAL SHELL AVAILABILITY

Bass drums: 20"x14"  
(with mount), 22"x16",  
24"x14"; Rack toms:  
10"x7", 12"x8", 13"x9";  
Floor toms: 14"x14",  
16"x16", 18"x16";  
Snare drum: 14"x6"

### SUPPLIED HEADS

Toms and snare: Remo  
Coated Ambassador  
batters and Clear  
resonants; Bass drums:  
Remo Coated  
Powerstroke 4

### LUGS

Mapex Crown lugs

### MOUNTING HARDWARE

SoniClear tom  
suspension; SoniClear  
floor tom feet;  
Low-Contact bass drum  
claws; Memory-Mark  
bass drum spurs

### CONTACT

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# GEAR REVIEW

## They say...

### Martin Potts

Martin Potts is Artist Manager for Mapex at British distributors Korg UK Ltd



### Why the walnut and maple hybrid?

"This is two answers in one really, and it all comes down to sound. We love the tone this combination of woods gives to the drums. The walnut gives us attack and projection, whilst the maple adds a balancing body and warmth. The two woods working together gives the shells a deep well-rounded bottom end, particularly at low tuning, but keeps the drums responsive and articulate with clear cutting voices. Which is why sound guys in particular really love working with them."

### Is the Saturn shell unchanged for the Tour Edition?

"Not quite. At heart it's the Saturn shell we've been producing for almost 20 years, just with ever-evolving and improving features, like the SoniClear edges. That's because we love the sound the walnut/maple blend produces. However, to incorporate the wraps with minimum compromise to that classic tone we had to slim the toms and snares down to a 6-ply, 5.1mm shell, and using slightly thinner maple plies on the bass drum, lifting that to 8-ply to keep the strength in the 7.5mm shell wall."

out to determine height. Most drummers do this by eye, but with the calibrations you can set the drum level more accurately and easily.

When it comes to the 14"x6" snare drum, Mapex has continued to make detail improvements and adjustments. For example, the bottom 2.3mm chromed snare drum hoop has snare gates, which is another classy vintage touch. This allows room for the snare wires themselves to be strung at a 45° angle,

THERE'S A GOOD BALANCE BETWEEN HEAD TONE AND SHELL TIMBRE, WITH PLENTY OF WOODY DEPTH FROM THE SHELLS AND LOADS OF SUSTAIN FROM THE HEADS



### SONICLEAR TOM MOUNT

Mapex's small tom mount screws into the bottom of paired upper lugs, staying clear of the tension bolts



### HARDWARE

The Saturn V Tour Edition features rock solid, and neatly-fitted hardware throughout its shells

thus pulling them up better to sit flat on the bottom head.

The pull-away lever on the otherwise excellent Saturn Strainer is a little precarious (I caught it with my knee before shifting it further round). The lever is quite loosely held up and drops down rather easily if knocked.

### Hands On

Our review kit sizes really are classic 1970s heavy rock (and before that, big swing band)

### Also try...



### 1 PEARL MASTERS MAPLE RESERVE MRV SERIES KIT

**We say:** "Pearl's Maple Reserve blends vintage and cutting edge with 4-ply, 5mm 100 percent maple shells with 4-ply maple reinforcement rings."

proportions, particularly with regard to the bass drum's 24"x14". It's almost like buying a vintage kit, but with the advantage of substantially modernised hardware.

Pre-1970s kits also had thin shells and they were often maple or mahogany mixes. They often had hefty reinforcing rings too, but modern shell manufacture means you can have thin shells like the Saturn's that are strong by virtue of using thinner plies and more of them. The dark walnut inner ply is reminiscent of the mahogany of old Slingerlands, etc. The result is a ballsy bass drum that resonates impressively, has no stifling tom mounting plate and is very easy to tune.

Slapping my usual bass drum pedal on to the 24" hoop the beater strikes just below the centre. This is normal on a big bass drum and hitting off-centre automatically gives a



### HARD-WEARING TOUR WRAPS

For the Tour Edition, Mapex has opted for just four plastic wraps in white, gold and black

### SNARE THROW-OFF

Mapex's Saturn throw-off/strainer has a piston design and snare wires are tensioned at 45° for optimum effect

different sort of sound. It's not so dead and has more rebound, so it feels livelier. It's impressive and suggests the expansive blast of a heavy rock beat, rather than the tight throb of a four-to-the-floor dance groove.

This is indeed a big rocking kick and is ably complemented by the classically proportioned toms. There's a big difference between a 12"x8" - which has become pretty standard in recent years - and a 13"x9", which can sound almost flabby by comparison. But 13"x9" feels right on a 24" kick. It has a lot of guts and works well over a wide tuning range. Tuned low, to just before it starts to whine, it's obscenely fat with massive sustain. And it retains that big sustain right through to high tension. Yet because of this very liveliness it does need careful management. In fact, this is true of all the drums - they're not difficult to tune, but getting the top and bottom heads in

### Also try...



### 2 SJC NAVIGATOR SERIES KIT

**We say:** "SJC's first Taiwan built drums offer similar specs to its American built drums at a much reduced price."

balance seems more vital than ever. It's worth that extra effort to ensure the whole kit speaks smoothly and sympathetically.

The thin shells and walnut inners lower the timbre for a slightly darker, meatier tone. So even when tuned higher than usual, the 16"x16" floor tom - like the 13" tom - retains a deep bark. And the 14"x6" snare follows suit. Tuned up it's super-crisp in the centre with a slappy, sharp, clearly articulated stroke. Moving towards the edge the ringing of the shell increases dramatically. Again like the 13 tom, it's noticeable when tuned right down the drum gets wildly ring-y and hums, but put some fairly hefty top head damping on and you get a great dark and dirty snare.

In summary, the Saturn Tour's wide tuning range allows for versatility, but benefits from judicious tensioning. The shells are some of the thinnest available on big-production kits.

That's great for resonance, but are they tough enough for heavy live touring? With modern shell-making techniques, which allow multiple plies and thinner shells, that's a yes. Overall there's a good balance between head tone and shell timbre, with plenty of woody depth from the shells and loads of sustain from the heads. **R**

**VERDICT:** Mapex's perennially popular Saturn V series gains a touring kit with hard-wearing wrap finishes, retro classic sizes and big, deep sounds from the unique maple-walnut hybrid shells.

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