

GEAR REVIEW

MAPEX SATURN V



£1,539 *With a nip and a tuck, the Saturn Series continues its evolutionary journey through the drumming universe*

WORDS: DAVE HOLMES

Over the last decade the Mapex Saturn Series has been systematically transformed beyond recognition of its Saturn Pro ancestry. Early last year, we checked out the Saturn IV which received a complete facelift to include Black Panther-styled lugs and the superbly engineered Soniclear suspended tom mounts, each contributing massively to a sleeker appearance and enhanced resonance. While these were quite major developments for the Series, there were also additional, slightly more subtle refinements too. What exciting new features can we expect from the Saturn V, and how will they compare to the Saturn IV?

Build

Taking centre stage this issue is a brand new four-piece Saturn V shell pack, finished in one of the new schemes of the mouth-watering Exotic Natural Maple Burl. These

running diagonally at an angle of 45°. The Maple provides the bulk of shell construction having four plies (with a veneer on top) and another two plies of walnut. There is a thin coating of sealer over the inner shell wall surface which feels smooth to the touch. The finishing touch to each drum comes from the complementary black nickel plating (found on all of the Saturn V Exotic kits), upon all of the metal hardware - perfect.

Following in the footsteps of Mapex's Armory and Mars Series, one of the most significant upgrades for these new drums is the Soniclear bearing edge. While the inner edges are trimmed to 45° for the rack toms and 60° for the kick and floor toms, instead of the usual sharp summit, this edge has a slightly rounded, flattened back-cut which extends out to the shell's outer edge. This allows greater contact between the head and shell which, according to Mapex is to coax as much depth out of the drums and help with

IT DOESN'T TAKE MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES FOR EACH DRUM TO BEGIN TO OPEN UP AND RESONATE, AS IF YOU'VE JUST FLICKED A SWITCH

Exotic 'Sound Wave' MXN drums are just one of seven preconfigured sets available. Mapex describes this review selection as "offering balanced versatility in the ultimate shell pack for use with any and every music genre". This lush review line-up includes a pair of comparatively shallow 'short stack' 10"x7" and 12"x8" rack toms, a 16"x14" floor tom, a portly-proportioned 22"x18" kick and the newly designed TH800 Soniclear suspended tom clamps, which are included with each of the rack toms in every shell pack.

In keeping with Saturn's traditional hybrid construction, the shells are made from plies of American Rock Maple and walnut - each drum topped with a sumptuous layer of Natural Burl Maple veneer. The deep figuring of the Burl grain is as distinctive as it is beautiful and wouldn't look out of place on any piece of high-class furniture. Each seam is staggered (including the veneer) and

tuning (see They Say... over the page). For Mapex, like many other manufacturers, it's a delicate balancing act between squeezing as much resonance from the shells and attaining the fundamental tone from the shell.

One of the other upgrades for the Saturn V is the Soniclear rack tom clamps/mounts. Instead of the usual two component parts of clamp and spiked resin ball, this bracket combines both. This is said to help the toms to resonate rather than the hardware absorbing the energy of the drum. These are extremely beefy and robust pieces of hardware which weigh roughly 2kg each. They are designed to fit a range of tube diameters from ¾" (approx. 19mm) up to well over 1" or nearly 30mm. The cunning design allows the user to clamp them with only one hand helped by a spring which holds the clamp jaw open for the task. One neat design element worth mentioning is a



SHELLS

Shells are made from plies of American Rock Maple and walnut, each drum topped with Natural Burl Maple veneer

BEARING EDGES

Soniclear bearing edge has a slightly rounded flattened back-cut which extends to the shell's outer edge

TOM MOUNT

Bracket combines clamp and spiked resin ball; this is said to help the toms resonate rather than the hardware



KICK DRUM SPURS

'Memory Mark' gauge helps speed set-up time in achieving the same optimal angle on both sides

Essential spec



PRICES

Saturn V Series MH Exotic Edition four-drum shell pack (10"x7", 12"x8" rack toms, 16"x14" floor tom, 22"x18" kick and two TH800 tom mounts), £1,539

SHELL MATERIAL

Maple/walnut with an Exotic Burl Maple veneer

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Plywood with scarf jointing

NUMBER OF PLYS

4 outer plies of Maple; 2 inner plies of Walnut; 1 veneer of Burl Maple

SHELL THICKNESS

Bass Drum: 7.5mm; Toms: 6.15mm

BEARING EDGE

Rack toms: Soniclear 45°; Bass drum and Floor tom: Soniclear 60°

EXOTIC EDITION FINISHES

Natural Maple Burl (as with review), Natural Ash Burl, Satin Black Maple Burl, Cherry Mist Rosewood Burl, Transparent Ash Burl, Deep Water Maple Burl, Cherry Mist Maple Burl

HOOPS/RIMS

Bass drum: matching Burl Maple wooden hoops; toms: triple-flanged 2.3mm steel Mapex Power Hoops

ADDITIONAL SHELL OPTIONS

By special order through local Mapex dealer

SUPPLIED HEADS

USA-made Remo - toms: clear Emperor batters, clear Ambassador resonant; bass drum: Ebony front head, clear Powerstroke 3 batter

SUSPENDED TOM MOUNTS

Mapex Soniclear TH800

CONTACT

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GEAR REVIEW

They say...

Pete Havard Korg UK Marketing Co-ordinator



What upgrades have been made to the Saturn V?

"The main upgrades are subtle but incredibly effective. The Soniclear bearing edge is now cut on all Saturn V, Armory and Mars drum shells. It's a rounded back-cut edge that flattens out at the apex so we're increasing the contact area between head and shell. The back-cut allows the head to sit flatter and make better contact with the shell's flat edge. The result is a stronger and deeper fundamental pitch, effortless and consistent tuning, and a significantly expanded tuning range. The Soniclear Tom Mount is supplied as standard with all Saturn V shell packs; a single, ergonomic unit that reduces the stages between drum and stand; by having one unit that acts as tom arm and clamp, the drum is allowed to resonate for longer, resulting in a longer sustain. With clear measure marks on the clamp side, you set it to your stand's tube diameter and all future attachment is a piece of cake, the sprung, hinged locking-clamp stays in place and can be applied by one hand."

Is it easier to tune?

"Tuning is made easier with a more stable seated head. When sat perfectly flat, the tension around the counter hoop is more evenly distributed so as the tension is applied, the pitch increases gradually, making finding that sweet spot easier than ever."



OPTIONS

Exotic 'Sound Wave' MXN drums of review are just one of seven preconfigured sets available

recess within the clamp itself which allows the spiked portion to fold neatly into it - it may be heavy but it won't take up too much room in the accessory case!

Hands On

This shell pack comes fully booted with USA manufactured Remos all round. For the batters we have the dual-ply Emperors, partnered by single-ply Ambassadors for each of the resonant heads. Out of the boxes, as per usual, the heads come tautly tensioned, but rarely are they ever 'tuned'. Time to roll the sleeves up, slacken off the tension and bring it back up gradually in the hope that we can swiftly locate the 'sweet spot' where the shell and head vibrate in sympathy. It doesn't take more than a few minutes for each drum to begin to open up and resonate; literally as if you've just flicked a switch - it can be that noticeable.

So up go the freshly tuned rack toms onto the spikes of the new Soniclear mounts. In use the new clamps prove to be surprisingly quick and convenient. The extra-wide clamp jaw readily fits the widest diameter tubes of my stands and the resin balls lock the drums into position with hardly any pressure from the winged bolt. The 'Memory-Mark' gauge

on the kick spurs also helps speed set-up time in achieving the same, optimal angle on both sides. With just one twist of the large rubber foot, the sharp point of the spur spike is exposed and the kick feels 'locked' onto the stage surface. However, with the spikes retracted, they do feel as if they were quite loose and about to fall off; my initial thoughts were that they could be prone to rattling about. With the weight of this big drum sat on the stage floor, the sheer bulk of the kick sees any worries completely unfounded.

After playing around with the kit for a while I decide to alter the tension of the batter heads on each of the toms, reducing them slightly, hoping to achieve a slight downward pitch bend - trying for a nice 'dooooo' sound. Attempting this mid-performance can be risky, but it's about putting trust in the drums with the tuning components and heads - each adjustment is made smoothly without any nasty surprises. This was certainly true of the kick where, as was expected, its corpulent stature and Remo Powerstroke heads would provide me with a decent thump.

After a few minutes of 'playing in', I reduce the tension of the batter so it's just up from the wrinkle stage where it packs a

Also try...



1 YAMAHA ABSOLUTE HYBRID MAPLE KIT

We say: "Calling on expertise in various areas of instrument manufacture, the Absolute Hybrid Maple exemplifies Yamaha's pursuit of excellence."



2 DW DESIGN SERIES

We say: "The standard of build is nothing short of superb, faultless in fact."

capable punch and allows a confident performance. With its deep gutsy clout there's enough power on hand to be able to taunt the bass player with the true meaning of bottom end!

While the rack toms remain highly pitched, you feel they are just a little over mid-point of their large tuning range. They are also quite ballsy, with a short but pleasant overtone and, thanks to a reduction in batter tension, also possess that downward pitch-bend which I prefer. As the heads are still tight, we can enjoy a lightning-quick stick response. Again there's often a fine line between trying to get the sound deep enough while not compromising feel, the combination of relatively shallow depths, decent twin-ply heads and the rounded bearing edge all contribute to a great sound. It's interesting to note that even after a full-on gig, there is no evidence of any detuning on any of the drums - impressive. **R**

VERDICT: This is a fantastic all-rounder kit which is equally happy on stage or in the studio - on a jazz gig or playing rock. They say we buy with our eyes and with just one glance, be warned, this kit has the potential to open even the tightest-shut wallet - it also happens to sound pretty awesome too!

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

WITH ITS DEEP GUTSY CLOUT THERE'S ENOUGH POWER ON HAND TO BE ABLE TO TAUNT THE BASS PLAYER