

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER BLACK WIDOW KIT

From £330 *The latest Black Panther kit is available in any colour – as long as it's black...*

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Mapex's Black Panther series was relaunched in 2010 as a collection of 14 high-spec snare drums built from many different, often exotic shell materials. Since then, three entire Black Panther kits based on individual snares have been produced in limited numbers. Following in the footsteps of the well-received Blaster, Velvetone and Retrosonic kits comes the Black Widow.

Build

The production run is again limited for the Mapex Black Panther Black Widow kit, with a mere 30 sets projected to reach the UK. While a finite number of each of the Black Panther kits has been built, the snares that inspired them remain in production. Reflecting this, the kits are sold as bass drum, tom and floor tom shellpacks while the snares are available separately. As with the three Black Panther kits that preceded it, the Black Widow kit is available in only one configuration – in this case 22"x18" bass drum, 10"x7" and 12"x8" toms and 14"x12" and 16"x14" floor toms – and in one finish, Transparent Black Lacquer. The snare also comes in a single size – 14"x5" – and the same black finish.

In comparison with the maple/walnut Blaster, maple/walnut/maple Velvetone and the all-walnut Retrosonic, the Black Widow shells are a relatively conventional all-maple build. Across the kit the shells are straight-sided (ie: no reinforcement rings), 6-ply and 100 percent North American maple. The snare, toms and floor toms are 5.1mm thick while the bass drum's chunkier individual plies means it comes in at a stouter 7.2mm. The standard of construction is excellent, with the individual shells being well within tolerance for roundness and beautifully finished in general. Bearing edges are cut with rounded rather than sharp peaks in order to maximise head contact and promote a full-bodied response.



Again these are bang on the mark for accuracy and consistency.

While the insides of the shells are sanded to a fine smoothness, on the outside the theme is most definitely black. To Mapex's credit there are no half measures with execution of the finish, and the Transparent Black Lacquer is deep and glossy while still allowing the grain of the wood to show through from below. Meanwhile every single piece of shell hardware down to the tension rods is nickel-plated. This commitment to visual noir is followed through to the point of obsession, with even the nylon washers being black. On the snare drum the cord that attaches the wires to the snare release and butt end is, inevitably, also black.

Black Panther double-ended tube lugs that taper sinuously in the middle are fitted to the snare drum. The rest of the drums sport individual short tube lugs, seen previously on the one-off Black Panther Sledgehammer kit and not slated to feature on any other Mapex drums. Thick rubber washers in (you've guessed it) black insulate the shell at the twin points of contact. Mapex's SONIClear tom mounts hook onto the narrow mid-section of two lugs on each rack tom. A third stabilising arm on the mount that points downwards is simply fitted with a rubber stop to protect the shell. The mounts appear to be permanently attached and don't impede



HARDWARE

Every single piece of shell hardware is nickel plated

FINISH

Finish options are limited to one colour: black – nyctophobic drummers beware!

BASS DRUM

Bass drum features beautifully sculpted low-contact claws and Memory-Mark spurs

Essential spec



PRICES

Mapex Black Panther Black Widow kit (10"x7", 12"x8", 14"x12", 16"x14" & 22"x18"), £2,878; 14"x5" snare, £330

SHELL MATERIAL

North American maple

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Ply

NUMBER OF PLYS

Snare, toms & floor toms: 6-ply, 5.1mm; bass drum: 6-ply, 7.2mm

BEARING EDGES

45°, rounded centre, counter cut

FINISHES AVAILABLE

Transparent black lacquer with brushed black chrome hardware

HOOPS

Mapex 2.3mm Sonic Saver hoops on snare, toms and floor toms; matching maple hoops on bass drums

SHELL AVAILABILITY

10"x7" & 12"x8" toms, 14"x12" & 16"x14" floor toms; 22"x18" bass drum; 14"x5" snare

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Suede Ambassador batters and clear Ambassador resonant on toms and floor toms; Remo Suede Powerstroke 3 batter and matching Suede front head on bass drum; Remo coated Ambassador batter and Hazy Ambassador snareside on snare

LUGS PER DRUM

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

TOM MOUNTS

SONIClear suspension mounts, stand-mounted

CONTACT

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I LET MY GUARD DROP AND BEGIN A PHIL COLLINS TRADEMARK PEAL AROUND THE KIT, AND ONCE YOU'VE STARTED, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP

They say...

Pete Havard, Korg UK Marketing Co-ordinator



What made you choose the Black Widow to be the fourth Black Panther kit?

"We were incredibly excited about how the shell would perform in full kit form - it was one of the snares just screaming out to be developed!"

In an age of countless choice it's refreshing to find kits restricted to one shellpack and finish option...

"That's the beauty of the BP Collection project: it's a self imposed 'limitation' in order to stay as physically and sonically close to the snare as we can."

Are there ever any surprises as you scale up from snare drums to bigger sizes?

"Surprises in a good way. With this kit it would have been easy to follow a trend of deep depth kick, but the more traditional 18" gave the ultimate tone and it balanced perfectly with the tom sizes, so the decision was made."

Any clues as to the identity of the next Black Panther kit?

"A huge part of the fun of the BP Collection is dropping these killer kits on an unsuspecting audience and seeing the response... watch this space!"



TOM MOUNTS

SONIClear tom mounts hook onto mid-section of two lugs on each tom

TOM LEGS

Moulded feet on the SONIClear floor tom legs are designed to encourage resonance

head changing. Sonic Saver hoops, with their curved top lip, are found on the snare, toms and floor toms. An exclusive Black Panther component, they are an ingenious compromise between triple-flanged and die-cast hoops. Matching maple hoops top and tail the bass drum.

Hands On

Ambassador thickness Remo Suede heads are fitted to the toms and floor toms while the bass drum is shod with a pair of Suede Powerstroke 3s. The Suede heads bring more than a touch of warmth with them,

impossible to stop, much to the amusement and bemusement of the rest of the band. Swapping Suede Ambassadors for clear versions brings a darker, even more saturated tonality to the toms. Personally I prefer the original Suede heads for their wide open sound, yet still with some semblance of control. The same qualities are present in the undrilled bass drum, which produces a deep, expansive and breathy note. Like the toms it responds with all its frequencies when played softly and any overtones that are generated are so harmonious they are welcome guests.

AT 5" DEEP A QUICK RESPONSE IS VIRTUALLY GUARANTEED AND THE SNARE DOESN'T DISAPPOINT, OUT OF THE BLOCKS ON THE 'B' OF EACH BEAT

emphasising the toms' sweetness over pure power. That's not to say that they don't ignite when dug into as they will sing as loud as you're prepared to hit them. However, the notes are so rich and full - even when tapped enquiringly - that I find myself actually underplaying. Sparse, Ringo-style tom orchestrations become the order of the day, allowing each tom's smooth decay to overlap the next until all four are meshing in harmony. At one point I let my guard drop and begin a Phil Collins trademark peal around the kit... and once you've started it's

Similarly, as the playing velocity increases, its response seems to expand to fill all available space. The warmth discernible at the edge of the note doesn't mask the thunderous power on tap when sufficient force is engaged. Burying the beater clips some of the decay and with it warmth, making for a harder, more focussed sound. Letting the beater fall away encourages a Bonham-esque rumble of low end with each stroke. Cutting a port in the front head (at the request of the sound engineer) reduces the level of resonance minimally, but

Also try...



1 PEARL MASTERS PREMIUM LEGEND

We say: "Pearl's expertise is all over this solidly constructed, great looking and exquisite-sounding kit."



2 YAMAHA ABSOLUTE MAPLE

We say: "All-maple shells made to Yamaha's usual standard, die-cast hoops and over 20 gorgeous finishes to choose between."

dampening is not required at any point. Although fitted with a regular Ambassador batter rather than a Suede head the snare still possesses a good deal of the finesse and depth found in the toms and bass drum. Crisp and assertive attack is augmented by a woody note that drives the sound through. At 5" deep a quick response is virtually guaranteed and the snare doesn't disappoint here, out of the blocks on the 'b' of each beat. I found it surprisingly good at dealing with the extremes of tuning, gigging it first with a ska band and then with a pub rock covers band. For the ska gig I cranked the batter head up so far it felt more like a table top than a drum, but the snare still sang without choking and was sensitive across the head. Tuned at a gentler mid tension for the pub covers band, the snare coped equally well, delivering an appropriately throaty note with no little power. **R**

VERDICT: Drums have to be special to join Mapex's Black Panther range and the Black Widow kit definitely fulfils the entry requirements. The lack of options and limited production run is an interesting tactic that risks being self defeating, but if anything it makes the kit even more desirable.

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