

GEAR REVIEW

GRETSCH RENOWN MAPLE 2016

£1,532 *The Big G's professional line gets an overhaul... hold on to your hoops, Renown's back in town*



WORDS: **STUART WILLIAMS**

The 'pro' level acoustic kit market is a tough battleground, with a target audience made up of savvy players who have a solid idea of what they like (or don't), have probably developed a sense of brand loyalty, and in some cases aren't afraid to buy used gear. Giggling drummers who want great sounds, features and finishes for a street price of between a grand and £1,500 are spoilt for choice with production kits from big names such as DW, Tama, Mapex, Pearl and a whole lot more. Another titan that does battle in this arena is Gretsch, whose Renown series has been a staple for jobbing drummers since its introduction in the early noughties. The Renown has undergone multiple revisions since then, and at the start of 2016 Gretsch unveiled the latest update to this perennial of the live scene. As with many NAMM announcements, these things take time to filter through to the shelves of our local drum stores, but the Renown 2016 has

on the Broadcaster and Brooklyn sets, the idea being that the reduced mass allows for greater resonance than a die-cast hoop, whilst maintaining the focused tone.

All good so far, but what may not be so quickly apparent at first glance is the fact that Gretsch has also reverted to using a drilled bass drum and post to mount the rack toms.

The Renown is available in four different familiar jazz, fusion, euro or rock configurations, each with or without a 14"x5½" or 14"x6½" snare. The rack toms are 10"x7", 12"x8" and 13"x9", floor toms are either 14"x14", 16"x14", or 16"x16", and there are three bass drums: 18"x14", 20"x16", 22"x18" and 24"x14". Meanwhile, Gretsch offers an additional 8"x7" tom, 18"x16" floor tom and 14"x5" snare drum outside of these configurations. On top of this, there are four lacquer finishes and three wrapped finishes available to choose from (Cherry Burst, Gloss Natural, Piano Black, Satin Tobacco Burst, Silver Oyster Pearl,

WE QUICKLY TOOK OUR TOMS FROM A CONTROLLED THICK ROCK SOUND WITH JUST A LITTLE TENSION ON THE BATTERS TO A SINGING, RING-FREE CLARITY AT MEDIUM TENSION

finally arrived, complete with a reduction in price compared to the previous model.

Build

Gretsch last updated the Renown in 2013, adding the GTS suspension mounts and changing from the 'stop sign' badges to the more vintage-styled and much coveted 'Round Badge'. So what's new here? Well, Renown kits have always featured Gretsch hallmarks such as the Formula shells, 30° bearing edges and the silver sealer interior. While these remain, the big news is the replacement of die-cast rims with Gretsch 302 hoops. These double-flanged hoops are found

Vintage Pearl and Blue Metal).

Our review kit is in the Euro set-up (22", 10", 12", 16") with a 14"x5½" snare, and comes in the expensive-looking Cherry Burst gloss-lacquered finish.

Hands On

There are a few realisations when taking our Renown out of its boxes. The first is the visuals: it's flawless. The deep, rich Cherry Burst looks like it could be on a kit costing twice as much, and the topcoat has been buffed to a glassy-smooth finish.

Next up is the hardware: nothing here feels 'off-the-peg'. From the tapered





302 HOOPS

The double-flanged 302s have trickled down from Gretsch's USA brothers in the Brooklyn and Broadkaster lines

HEADS

Renown kits come with Remo P3 (bass drum), Emperor (toms) and Ambassador batter heads (snare), so you can be gig-ready from the off

FINISHES

The 2016 Renown is available in seven finishes: three wrapped and four lacquered

Essential spec



PRICES

12"x8", 14"x14", 18"x14": £1,087; 12"x8", 16"x14", 22"x18": £1,335; 10"x7", 12"x8", 14"x14", 20"x16", £1,419; 13"x9", 16"x16", 24"x16", £1,429; 10"x7", 12"x8", 16"x14", 22"x18" (as reviewed), £1,532; 14"x5½" snare, £279; 14"x6½" snare, £286

SHELL MATERIAL

Gretsch Formula Maple

CONSTRUCTION

Ply

PLIES

Seven

BEARING EDGES

30°

FINISHES

Cherry Burst (pictured), Gloss Natural, Piano Black, Satin Tobacco Burst, Silver Oyster Pearl, Vintage Pearl, Blue Metal

HOOPS

Gretsch 302 3mm double-flanged hoops

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Bass drum: 18"x14", 20"x16", 22"x18", 24"x14"; toms: 8"x7" (special order), 10"x7", 12"x8", 13"x9"; floor toms: 14"x14", 16"x14", 16"x16", 18"x16" (special order); snares: 14"x5½", 14"x6½"

SUPPLIED HEADS

Bass drum: Remo Clear Powerstroke P3 batter, Gretsch coated resonant (with muffle ring); toms: Remo Clear Emperor batter resonant, Gretsch by Remo resonant; snare: Remo Coated Ambassador batter, Gretsch by Remo resonant

LUGS PER DRUM

Rack toms: 5; floor tom: 8; snare: 10; kick: 10

TOM MOUNTS

Gretsch GTS suspension mounts

CONTACT

Gewa Music
gb.gewamusic.com
www.gretschdrums.com

GEAR REVIEW

They say...

Mario Junghans
Product Manager, percussion
instruments Gewa Music



The new Renown includes the 302 hoops found on the Brooklyn and Broadkaster series, what was behind the decision to switch from die-cast?

"The 302 makes it a real upgrade in our opinion. The 302s are 3mm,

double-flanged steel hoops. These hoops are similar to hoops used in the 1950s, but are constructed from a heavier gauge steel to stand up to today's playing styles. The hoop helps create a more open tone than a die-cast hoop with more overtones to the overall sound but still keeps the stability of a die-cast hoop. It's the best of both worlds."

The kit seems easy to tune - how much of this is down to the hoops?

"A lot for sure. It's not about the hoop construction only though, but also the famous Gretsch five-lug pattern on the 10" and 12" toms which helps to find the 'sweet spot' easier. In general, it is the full package of perfectly shaped hoops, an absolutely round shell and the perfect and clean bearing edge that makes the sound and tuning of a drum great and easy. We think the Renown has it all."

Gretsch has also changed the Renown to a drilled bass drum. How come?

"The Renown is the workhorse drum kit in the line and so we wanted to provide a convenience set-up for gigging that gets you in and out of the club quickly."

There is a lot of attention to detail on the Renown's hardware...

"Absolutely. The Renown has been revered for its rock-solid quality and excellent sound. We tried to upgrade this with some of the USA features and make it the most affordable 'Gretsch-ish' kit ever. Most importantly, we've still managed to lower the price by about 10 percent!"

HARDWARE

None of the hardware feels 'off the peg', rather that they are made for your kit



TOM MOUNTS

Toms are mounted from the bass drum and use Gretsch GTS suspension mounts



▶ T-wing thumbscrews to the Gretsch 'G' cast into the memory locks, it feels like these parts are made for your kit, rather than sourced, which is rare for what is an eastern-made entry-point into the upper end of a company's line-up. Finally, there's the inclusion of decent heads. The argument against this has long been that every drummer uses different heads, so there's no point in adding to the price tag with expensive

— yet still not necessarily suitable — heads, but we're glad to see that Gretsch has included a clear Remo P3 (bass drum), clear Emperors (toms) and a coated Ambassador on the snare drum.

After fitting the heads and lugs, we're ready to roll, and we start in earnest with the toms. The rack toms are a five-lug design, making tuning nice and fast, but it's also down to the combination of lugs, hoops and heads

Also try...



1
TAMA
STARCLASSIC
PERFORMER BB

We say: "The Tama Starclassic BB is a solid, pro-level kit that, at this price, is absurdly good value."

that make the Renown a doddle to play. We quickly took our toms from a controlled thick rock sound with just a little tension on the batters (arguably the Emperor's wheelhouse for tone and feel) to a singing, ring-free clarity at medium tension with the reso and batter in unison. Higher tunings worked well without choking out too, although this is where single-ply heads will most likely make the difference. The floor tom follows suit with a controlled beefy thud at lower tunings, and clarity when pitched up. So that's a tick for the 302 hoops!

Prior to playing, the bass drum was the part of the kit that intrigued us the most. Undrilled bass drums used to be the preserve of high-end kits, and have become very popular in recent years for a few reasons. First is the argument that cutting a hole in the

THE DEEP, RICH CHERRY BURST LOOKS LIKE IT COULD BE ON A KIT COSTING TWICE AS MUCH, AND THE TOPCOAT HAS BEEN BUFFED TO A GLASSY-SMOOTH FINISH



SHELL PACK

Each configuration is available with or without the matching 14"x5½" maple snare drum

CONFIGURATIONS

We tested the most 'standard' configuration (10", 12", 16", 22", 14" snare), but there are three other jazz, fusion and rock set-ups available

shell and mounting a post in it can reduce the resonance of the drum. Second, many prefer the flexibility they give for mounting toms over a fixed post. Third (and one we've been guilty of) is the visual aspect: undrilled bass drums look cool. So, it was a surprise to see that Gretsch has opted to go back to mounting the toms from the bass drum, making (at the time of writing) the Brooklyn the most affordable way to get an undrilled bass drum in the Gretsch line-up.

However, it really doesn't matter, because this bass drum sounds huge. With an un-ported reso head and the P3, we didn't find any need for any extra muffling. Tuned low, it's gutsy and sustained, while adding some tension reveals more of a funky punch, and we didn't have any problems positioning the toms in a comfortable way.



2 DW DESIGN SERIES

We say: "The standard of build is nothing short of superb, faultless in fact. The sound is impressive and all the features equally so."

Finally, let's talk about the snare. It's a straightforward 14"x5½" maple drum: great for the everyman nature of the kit, if not the most personality-fuelled drum. The most impressive part of the snare was the controlled nature of its sound. Tune it dead, thick and clear without annoying buzzes. Tune it with some ring, and you get a clean overtone. It's adaptable and will work in multiple styles, and if you don't own a decent wooden snare already, is well worth considering.

Of all the mainstream brands out there, it's fair to say that Gretsch is currently very much 'in' in terms of trends, without leaning heavily towards any one particular type of player, and we'd say that's also true of the Renown.

Take a cross-section of the Gretsch artist roster: session aces like Ash Soan and Karl Brazil, technical titans like Vinnie Colaiuta,

rock legends Taylor Hawkins and Charlie Watts, or contemporary tastemakers like Mark Guiliana and Mike Johnston, roll it into one and that sums up the Renown perfectly. It's a great combination of Gretsch's heritage vibe, mixed with modern functionality. **R**

VERDICT: The 2016 Gretsch Renown hits its target market bang-on. It's a tonal chameleon, with stunning looks, and it is within reach financially for those looking to step up from a mid-priced kit.

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