

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER SNARES

From £255 Mapex's popular Black Panther series gets a complete makeover. Geoff Nicholls tries out the first six of 14 entirely new, widely varied designs

The name Black Panther, conjuring up speed and power allied to velvety sleekness, has been a winner for Mapex over the past decade. Now Mapex releases a new collection of 14 Black Panthers, and *Rhythm* has exclusive access to the lot. Six are here, the rest will feature on *Rhythm's* sister website *MusicRadar.com*.

The re-launch includes all new hardware. Each drum has either single-ended shield-design cast lugs, or elegantly sculpted twin-point mounted tube lugs. The patented

'Sonic Saver' hoops lie between flanged and die-cast hoops. Recalling the classic Slingerland 'Stick Saver' concept, the top lip of each pressed stainless steel hoop bends over and in, not out as on standard hoops.

The handsome throw-off is a smoothly operating pull-away lever with adjustable strainers at both ends. Micro lock knobs click silently as you turn them for sensitive adjustment of the stainless steel wires. There are several new bearing edge profiles, and capping it all a new die-cast, chrome-plated Black Panther badge.

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER SLEDGEHAMMER

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE
£379

SHELL

1.2mm gauge brass

CONSTRUCTION

Hammered brass with single vertical join

FINISH

Antique brass

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

NUMBER OF LUGS

Ten twin point mounted tube lugs

£379 This heavyweight drum packs a serious punch

Build

The Sledgehammer is one of the biggest bruisers of the bunch, with a 14"x6½" shell of 1.2mm gauge brass, hammered with large dimpled craters for a more complex tone. The finish is dark-ish antiqued brass and the shell has a vertical weld join which is invisible from the outside. The bearing edges have the traditional 45° turnover and all the hardware again has the antique brass finish for a unified, imposing look.

Hands On

Brass is seen as the tasteful option when it comes to metal snares. I therefore feel

Sledgehammer is a rather crude title for this drum, since, while it will undoubtedly give you plenty of clout when you need it, it is also capable of sensitive playing and the tone is refined. Sure, it will power the rocking-est of situations, but the tone is dark and fat with the extra depth that you expect from a 6½" shell. And rim shots have a musical, bell-like ring to them. So while all you metal hammers out there might reasonably gravitate towards this beast, it certainly won't let you down on musical tone. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

RIM SHOTS
have a musical, bell-like ring to them



BRASS SHELL
has large dimpled craters for a more complex tone

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER VELVETONE

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE
£369

SHELL

8.1mm thick - 3mm burl maple exterior, 3.4mm walnut middle, 1.7mm maple interior

FINISH

High gloss burl maple with dark-to-natural fade stain

BEARING EDGES

1:9 - 45° to sharp outer edge

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

LUGS

20 single ended chrome plated shield

£369 Exotic beauty with a sensitive, velvety tone

Build

Mapex has gone to town on the Velvetone, with its 8.1mm hybrid shell which is made up from a 3mm exterior of burl maple, enclosing 3.4mm walnut in the middle and 1.7mm of maple on the interior. The inner maple should boost the brightness and projection, while the walnut core adds a tiny bit more depth. It's a standard 14"x5½" shell with 45° bearing edges cut sharp to the exterior.

Hands On

Velvetone is a good name. Although it has quite a thick shell, my first impression was it was

deeper and softer, less crunchy and crisp than the all-walnut Retrosonic. The centre backbeat is thicker, deeper and softer. Unlike many snares it is happy tuned high or low. When tuned down and struck in the centre sweet spot it can feel like your stick has sunk in a half inch, it's so cushion-like. Yet it's still distinct and musical. You also get the best pressed roll, absolutely buttery at the edges, a seamless razzle. To top it off, when tuned down like this the cross-stick produces a thick, deep and woody timbre. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

UNLIKE MANY
snares, the Velvetone is happy tuned high or low



VELVETONE HAS
a hybrid shell made up of burl maple, maple and walnut

NEW GEAR

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER BLADE

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE
£255

SHELL

1mm gauge steel

CONSTRUCTION

Sheet steel bent and joined with single vertical weld

FINISH

Brushed metallic grey metal

BEARING EDGES

Traditional 45°

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

LUGS

20 single-ended shield lugs

£255 Reliable, all-rounder steel snare with a rasping tone

Build

The cheapest Panther, the Blade is no more shabby for that. The 14"x5½", 1mm steel shell has a just-visible internal vertical join and turned-over traditional 45° bearing edges. The shell and all the hardware are finished in a brushed metallic grey, giving the drum a more expensive image. It was also exactly round by my measurements.

Hands On

Steel may be the low-cost option but it is a splendid material for snare drum shells. At medium tension you get a dry, dark, thick and parchment-like tone in the

centre, but when you catch the rim it rings out like a - well, like a steel drum. The timbre is not as varied or complex as maple, say, but crunchier, so your double strokes are distinct and keen. The shell matches perfectly with the new Sonic Saver hoops and rim shots and cross-sticks are a joy, cutting through with ease. That distinctive steel ping is what you need to power just about any band. For many this will be the affordable workhorse Panther, true to the original concept and a no-brainer, reliable purchase. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

DISTINCTIVE STEEL
ping is what you need to power just about any band



BRUSHED METALLIC
grey finish gives the drum a more expensive image

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER RETROSONIC

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE
£465

SHELL

Walnut

CONSTRUCTION

Wood ply

FINISH

Satin smooth natural walnut burl

BEARING EDGES

1:9 - 45° to sharp outer edge

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

LUGS

Ten chrome-plated tube lugs

£465 Vintage tones and the luxury of 100 percent walnut

Build

The 14"x5½" Retrosonic is a real looker, perhaps the most gorgeous of all with the glorious swirling grain of rich walnut finished to a satin-smooth sheen. It's a relatively hefty 8.1mm all-walnut shell and has Mapex's so-called 1:9 bearing edges where there is a 45° slope right up to the sharp outer edge. Extremely shallow snare beds are cut almost imperceptibly, but this seems to be enough for them to work just fine. The micro sensitive new strainer plays its part in this. Chrome hardware and tube lugs complement the dark wood perfectly.

Hands On

Rather like the Velvetone, this drum has a sophisticated flavour with a dusky undercurrent. There is a good balance of bright and dark. Attack-wise, rim shots and cross-sticks cut the mustard with a tasty balance of woody and metallic tones. It's easy to be led on by the dark hue of the wood, but the drum does feel deeper than maple or birch, somehow a bit richer and thicker. This is a funky drum, you can imagine it on dirtier, bluesier grooves and New Orleans second line rolls, not to mention smoky nightclub jazz. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

ATTACK-WISE
there's a tasty balance of woody and metallic tones



SWIRLING GRAIN
of rich walnut is finished to a satin-smooth sheen



MAPEX'S SMOOTH

new self-lubricating cylinder drive throw-off requires minimal effort to operate.



EACH BLACK PANTHER

has one of two distinctive new lug designs, including this elegantly curved, twin point mounted tube lug.



STAINLESS STEEL 'SONIC SAVER'

hoops bridge the gap between flanged and die-cast. The top rim bends in, not out, creating a graceful profile.

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From the Horse's Mouth

Pete Havard, Korg UK Percussion Marketing Co-ordinator

What is the philosophy behind the new line-up?

"We wanted to keep the key elements that have made the Black Panther one of the most popular snare ranges in the drum market for the past 10 years - great sounding, great looking snare drums, reasonably priced whilst incorporating innovative shell and hardware features that keep them at the cutting edge of drum manufacture."

It's extensive and very impressive - how long has it been in the making?

"Mapex R&D have been developing the new Black Panther series over the past two years. It has been a very intensive process to find the ultimate diameter and depth to suit a particular shell material. As you will see from the line up, we only offer a duplicate size in the steel shell, all others (we feel) combine the perfect marriage of size and shell

construction for ultimate performance, resulting in a very wide range of distinctive sonic characters to suit every playing style and music genre."

The drums are not labelled with their individual model names. Why is that?

"We have incorporated the Mapex logo into the new Black Panther embossed badge design. Aesthetics were incredibly important for the Black



Pete Havard

Panther second generation and we felt that the classy look of the new lugs and shells speaks volumes without adding an additional badge."

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For reviews of the full Black Panther range visit



MAPEX BLACK PANTHER CHERRY BOMB

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE

£279

SHELL

Cherry wood

CONSTRUCTION

5.1mm cherry wood ply

FINISH

Clear gloss lacquer over deep red stain

BEARING EDGES

1:9 - 45° to sharp outer edge

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

LUGS

Eight chrome plated tube lugs

£279 Dare to be different with an alternative size and wood

Build

As its name implies, the Cherry Bomb is made from cherry wood - and to emphasise the connection the shell is finished in a dark red cherry stain and gloss lacquer. The inside is left a natural warm ruddy brown. The cherry has a pleasingly striated dark grain, offset by the chrome hardware, making this a pretty drum. The thin 5.1mm shell is a compact 13"x5½" and has well-cut, sharp bearing edges.

Hands On

Dropping the diameter by an inch makes quite a dramatic difference to your snare. The sound becomes

tubbier and more compact. The cherry imparts a full, plump, right-in-the-middle sort of sound, which is extremely pleasing, both warm and precise. The 1:9 bearing edges with the sharp edge right on the outside of the drum means the sensitivity extends right to the rim. I was impressed by the way the full bodied centre sweet spot extended almost two thirds of the way towards the edge of the shell. It's aided by the single ply Remo Coated Ambassador batter which is ideal for this small drum. This will make a handy alternative snare, with a distinctive quality. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

SNARE IS A
compact 13"x5½" with
a thin 5.1mm shell



SHELL IS CHERRY
wood finished in a dark
red cherry stain

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER BLACK WIDOW

ESSENTIAL SPEC

PRICE

£279

SHELL

Wood

CONSTRUCTION

Maple ply

FINISH

Transparent gloss black lacquer

BEARING EDGES

5:5 Sharp edge with round-over to the outside

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo Coated Ambassador batter and Ambassador Clear snare side

LUGS

Ten tube lugs in black lacquer

£279 The perfect tone with brooding dark looks

Build

The 14"x5" Black Widow has a thin ply shell, just 5.1mm of maple, finished on the outside in glossy black lacquer through which you can just see the grain. It has matching black chrome hardware. The shell has one of Mapex's new bearing edge profiles, dubbed '5:5', which is a 45° slope to a sharp edge with a round-over to the outside.

Hands On

14"x5" is a neglected size, being ½" under the standard 5½". That half an inch less, though, gives the drum a noticeable alacrity. This drum is mighty sharp, you get that

lovely sensation of crispness when you tap it - it's super-sensitive all over the batter head. And the SonicSaver hoops accentuate the pin-sharp cross-stick response. The maple bestows brightness and warmth, a fine tone, tempered by the fact the shell is thin, meaning it's resonant and relatively dark. The rounded-over bearing edges warm the tone a fraction. Here is a drum for when you need a rapid response without sacrificing tone and quality - whether you're slamming behind an indie-punk band or steering a nimble jazz trio. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

HALF AN INCH
less in depth gives the
drum a noticeable alacrity



SHELL IS THIN
meaning that it is resonant
and relatively dark

