

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

HEAVILY-CHROMED 2.3MM

Sonic Saver triple-flanged hoops turn over and in rather than over and out

HYBRID SHELLS

are 1.7mm maple, 3.4mm walnut and 3mm burl maple

Mapex tried out various different Black Panther snare drum shell make-ups before deciding on the four which would also make good kit shells





MAPEX BLACK PANTHER VELVETONE KIT

£2,210 Mapex's logical extension to its hugely successful snare range is the Black Panther kit, says Geoff Nicholls



BUTTER BURST GLOSS
Lacquer matches existing
Velvetone snare drum

BASS DRUM

claws are fully recessed and look a bit like rocket ships

Since 1997, Black Panther has been such a successful snare brand it was surely just a matter of time before we had a full Black Panther kit. There are 14 snares but Mapex plans just four Black Panther kits. The first two are based on the Blaster and – the review kit – the Velvetone.

Build

Mapex tried out various different Black Panther snare shell make-ups before deciding on the four that would also make good kit shells. The Velvetone has hybrid shells of 1.7mm maple, 3.4mm walnut and 3mm burl maple, the same on toms and kick. That adds up to 8.1mm, which is a thicker-than-average shell by today's standards. You certainly notice the extra weight.

The burl maple forms the exterior of the shells and is finished in Butter Burst Gloss Lacquer to match the existing Velvetone snare drum. It shows off the extravagantly swirling grain pattern of the Burl Maple, stained from dark to natural and back. It's a luxurious and expensive-looking veneer, in truth like a suite of Italian rococo furniture.

Bearing edges are described as 9:1 which I take to indicate nine plies cut at 45° from the inside right up to the outer edge where there is a single-ply round-over to the outside. The edges are excellent, though I was puzzled by slight variations in the shell interiors – the smallest tom's edges, and indeed its whole inner shell, were silky to the touch, whereas

the 16" tom's innards were less smooth and the bass drum noticeably rougher. The 16" and 12" toms were also about 3mm out of round, which is not that unusual but I would suggest is the maximum acceptable for shells in this quality bracket.

The Velvetone is only available as a single shell-pack with classic dimensions – 22"x18" bass, 10"x8" and 12"x9" mounted toms, 14"x14" and 16"x16" floor toms. We're promised some further add-on sizes for the future. The two small toms are fitted with Mapex's isolation bracket, the design of which has been given careful thought. It's the same principle as, but lighter than, the Orion bracket. Although it only grabs two lugs rather than the more usual four, it appears to be solid and stable since it grabs those two lugs from both above and below. The result is a less conspicuous mount. Each tom also has a TH684S ball-and-socket holder and AC910 multi-clamp for mounting from cymbal stands.

Completing the distinctive look of the toms are the triple-flanged, 2.3mm Sonic Saver™ hoops. Like Slingerland's vintage classic Rim Shot stick savers, the top lip of these hoops is bent over and in towards the centre rather than out like other triple-flanged hoops. They are already featured on the Velvetone snare, as are the small, single-ended shield-shaped lugs. The shield design, by the way, is nicely echoed in the floor tom leg brackets.

Bass drum claws have come on a long way. Since the demise of 'T' rods the drum

From the Horse's Mouth!

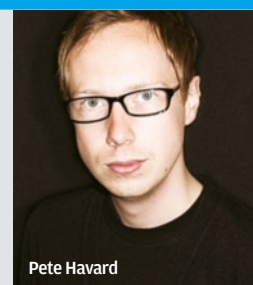
Pete Havard is Mapex's Marketing Coordinator for British distributor Korg UK

How did the series come about?

"The Black Panther Collection sets were a very natural concept that came to fruition after the release of the second generation Black Panther snare range in 2010. We knew there were drummers out there looking for something they found in our snare offering that they weren't finding elsewhere. We chose the shells we felt work best across a full set and went to work, keeping all the elements of the kit as their snare counterpart, the same shell and hardware finish, the same lugs, hoops and fittings."

Why now?

"I think everyone within Mapex felt it was the perfect time to produce some distinctive sets, both sonically and visually different to the Saturn or Orion. Mapex's philosophy is about exploring new construction methods and using innovative shell formulas that speak differently to give the drummer their own voice. We were so pleased with the G2 Black Panther snare tones it made sense to translate some of those to full sets. The first two sets, Velvetone and Blaster, are



Pete Havard

supplied in sizes that work best with the tonal properties of the shells. Velvetone is a fantastic recording kit with warm tone exuding class; Blaster is more of an aggressive beast that suits the live stage. Both have been produced in limited numbers worldwide and by the time this review hits the stores the first kits should be arriving in the UK."

MAPEX BLACK PANTHER VELVETONE KIT



THE TIDILY-DESIGNED

small tom isolation mounts are bracketed off just two lugs with fixings top and bottom.



BUTTER BURST BRINGS

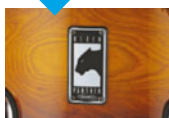
out the extravagantly swirling grain of the Italian burl maple veneer, buffed to a deep gloss.



SHIELD-SHAPED LUGS

are already featured on the Velvetone snare drum, and their design is nicely echoed in the floor tom leg brackets.

ESSENTIAL SPEC



PRICES

Velvetone/Blaster shell packs, £2,210

SHELL MATERIAL

Hybrid ply wood

CONSTRUCTION

Ply wood

PLIES

Velvetone: 1.7mm maple, 3.4mm walnut, 3mm burl maple - same on toms and kick; Blaster: 5.1mm American maple shell with 3.4mm walnut reinforcing ring

BEARING EDGES

Velvetone: 9:1, 45° to sharp outer edge; Blaster: 5:5 bearing edge with a rounded back-cut

HOOPS

2.3mm Sonic Saver, triple-flanged

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Velvetone: 22"x18", 10"x8", 12"x9", 14"x14", 16"x16"; Blaster: 22"x20", 10"x7", 12"x8", 14"x12", 16"x14"

LUGS PER DRUM

Small single-ended Black Panther lugs - small toms: 12; floor toms: 16; bass drum: 20

CONTACT

Korg (UK) Ltd,
9 Newmarket Court,
Kingston, Milton
Keynes MK10 0AU
Tel: 01908 857100
Email: info@korg.co.uk
Website: www.mapex.co.uk

key-tensioned bolts are usually enclosed for protection. Mapex's substantial claws are fully recessed and look a bit like rocket ships.

Everything about these drums shouts luxury. The deep gloss and lustrous chrome, the rounded and lacquered bass drum hoops, the chrome-on-black Black Panther badge, the distinctive small shield lugs and curvaceous Sonic Saver hoops.

Hands On

So often doing reviews it's murder trying to describe the sound, struggling to differentiate one Chinese-made kit from the dozen others that emerge each year. And they're all pretty good nowadays. Now and then, though, you're blown away from the start. And that's the case with the small Velvetone toms. Whenever a review kit arrives I eagerly rip open the smallest box, grab a stick and with small tom in left hand, wallop it with the right. Wow! That nearly blew my head off! The power and projection, the attack and body are something else. Yes, the drums came beautifully tuned, with the perfect heads - Remo Suede Ambassadors - so all was set for a good impression. But all the same, that was some tom. I was equally struck by the 12"x9" mounted tom. Fat, powerful warm tone.

Setting up the full kit there's the chance to

feel how the bass drum and toms sit together, how they blend. All four toms are beauties with no weaknesses, and the bass drum - with Powerstroke-3s (Suedes again) - blends seamlessly. This is a seriously good-sounding kit. There is a heartiness to the sound, some of which you can put down to the Suede Ambassador batters which seem warmer than normal Ambassadors. They have a rich,

There's almost a clatter as the head reacts and springs back, but everything after that is abundantly lush and dark

smooth surface which is slightly calf-like, a luxurious classic feel. Add to this the thick shells with their inner core of walnut that gives the tone extra character, while the sharp 1:9 outer bearing edge maximises the head diameter and clarifies the attack.

The two floor toms are just as good as the small toms. There is a Krupa-like heat to your tom blasts. Full depth comes from low-mid tuning, winding up to that spot where there is still just the hint of a flap on stick impact, followed by a deeply satisfying rumble. There's almost a clatter as the head reacts

and springs back, but everything after that is abundantly lush and dark. I loved this tuning, but for the sake of a rounded review I also wound up the toms - top and bottom heads - to close on a bebop/modern jazz-funk pitch. Here the precision was even more evident but the dusky timbre of the shells was not lost.

As for the 22" bass drum, I'm glad it's 18" and not 20" deep. In fact I'd like to hear a 16", but the 18" is a good compromise, avoiding the muddiness I find with 20" mega-deep drums. More obviously than the toms I thought it needed tuning up a little higher than usual, bringing out more of the complex tone of the hybrid shell. As usual I felt no need to put damping inside - the Powerstroke perimeter flaps being enough for acoustic purposes, certainly, when not miked up. All in all, the Velvetone does what quality kits do, it encourages versatility and experimentation.

Verdict

With the long-lived popularity of the Black Panther snare range Mapex now has a strong and original brand identity. Apart from looking fabulous the Velvetone truly impresses with its sound. The heavy-ish shells add power and projection, while the walnut-maple instills a slightly darker and warmer tone which will appeal to all styles of drummer. With three other BPs to choose from, which one will be the most popular remains to be seen, but the Velvetone will be hard to beat. A sure-fire hit. **R**

Rating ★★★★★

TRY IT WITH...



BLACK PANTHER

Velvetone snare drum - the obvious choice, but it looks right and will match up tonally.



TOP MAPEX 950

hardware set - your Velvetone kit will need a professional line of hardware and stands.



HARDCASES

Velvetone's elaborately-figured exterior lacquer deserves the very strongest protection.

