

SoundLab №.1

Roland V-Club Electronic Drum Set

by Norman Weinberg



Details, Details

Model: Roland V-Club kit

Price: \$1,495

Pads: Five PD-6 8 1/2" single-trigger pads, two CY-6 12" dual-trigger cymbal pads, one FD-6 hi-hat controller, KD-7 bass drum pad

Rack: MDS-6BK

Cables: All necessary cables are included

Number of Kits: 99

Number of Factory Songs: 150

Additional User Song Locations: 100

Number of Drum and Percussion Sounds: 1,042

Number of Backing Instruments: 262

Sequencer: 6 track with 12,000 note capacity

Polyphony: 64-note

Big Bang For the Buck

For a few years now, Roland's V-Drum Systems have been the top electronic drum sets on the market. Not only are

these kits tops in their class, they're tops in price too! The introduction of the V-Club kit is Roland's effort to bring some of the V-Drum technology to a kit with a lower price point. However, the V-Club kit isn't a scaled down version of a higher-line model. It's a totally new combination of pads and brain that offers a good feel, plenty of features, great sounds, and a slick user interface.

The Kit. The V-Club's pads are all brand new and designed exclusively for this TD-6 drum brain. The PD-6 pads included with the kit (five in all — snare, hi-hat, and three toms) are single-trigger pads. This means that you won't be able to program a separate sound from the head and from the rim. At 8 1/2", these pads are the perfect size — not too small to strike, not too large to position where you want them. These pads feel great. They've got a good deal of bounce, but not so much that you think you're playing on a superball. The playing surface has just a little bit of give, so the sensation of your stick hitting the pad is very natural.

While the pads aren't silent, they shouldn't bother anyone in another room.

The Roland KD-7 kick pad is a tried-and-true machine that's been around for a while. It works fine and has proved itself for years. The FD-7 hi-hat controller isn't new either, but it's a dream. It's easily the most playable electronic hi-hat being made. Along with the hi-hat pad, it can trigger open and closed hats, and a variety of sounds in between those two extremes. By itself, it can sound a closed "chick" or a foot "splash" with ease. The new 12" CY-6 cymbal pads are very cool. They feel much like acoustic cymbals, and being the only stereo pads included with the kit, they're capable of playing two different sounds: one from the bow of the pad and one from the edge. Most kits have the ride cymbal programmed to produce a ride sound and a bell sound. You can also choke sounds by grabbing the edge of the pad.

I'm a little "old school" in that I've never been a big fan of rack systems. But, I have to admit this rack is really slick. It pulls out of the box in a single piece, entirely assembled and ready to go. It's compact, light, highly adjustable and surprisingly solid. I had no trouble positioning the instru- ➔

ments in a comfortable location and once everything was tightened down, the pads stayed where I put them.

The Brain. Roland's New TD-6 brain is totally new. The back panel of the TD-6 contains all the necessary connections to take care of business, but there are no fancy bells and whistles. You'll find inputs for 11 triggers (kick, snare, hi-hat, tom 1, tom 2/aux, tom 3/4, crash 1, crash 2, and ride cymbal), a hi-hat controller, and a stereo mix input that can be used to connect a CD, MD, or cassette. Outputs include headphones, and one set of main stereo outputs. MIDI connections include MIDI-In and MIDI-Out. Too bad there's not at least one pair of auxiliary outputs. Those could come in very handy during a recording session.

The front panel is outstanding in its clear and clever layout. At the top sits the LCD display and the main volume knob — pretty straightforward. The rest of the face

selected the basic pad type, the TD-6 has a full complement of controls to adjust each of the pads to your playing style. You can fine tune the sensitivity, the threshold, the trigger curve (seven types), crosstalk cancel, scan time (between 0-4.0ms in 0.1ms steps), retrigger time, mask time (0-64 ms in 4ms steps), and rim sensitivity (only if you're using stereo pads). With all this power, you should be able to get the V-Club kit to respond to your every whim.

Editing Kits. For such a competitively-priced instrument, the TD-6 has plenty of flexibility when editing each of its 99 user-programmable kits. All possible editing functions are contained within five main sections: Instrument Settings, Ambience Settings, Equalizer Settings, Control Functions, and Common Functions.

The first set of controls is the instrument settings. Each pad (with a separate control for the head and the rim, only if you're using stereo pads) can fire any of

two little "tricks." Not only can you specify any position between hard left 15, center, and hard right 15; you can also program random and alternate settings. When the pan position is set to alternate, that instrument will switch from left to right with each stroke. When the random value is selected, the instrument will jump all over the stereo field. At first blush, you might think that the random selection would be pretty cheesy, but it's actually pretty cool. Each instrument can be tuned to any point between -480 and +480, and the sound's decay value can be set between -31 and +31. For pitch and decay, some instruments' sound may not continue to change beyond a certain point.

Ambience settings affect the entire kit. However, you can set different send levels for each of the instruments. This way, you can have the bass drum totally dry, the snare drum totally wet, and other instruments somewhere between. To adjust the ambience, you first select the location where the drums are "being played." Choices include living room, bathroom, recording studio, garage, locker room, theatre, cave, gymnasium, or domed stadium. Once the location has been determined, the next job is to select the type of walls in the virtual room. Here the choices are wood walls, plaster walls, or glass walls. As you might expect, moving from the warmth of the wood walls to the extremely bright glass walls changes the character of the sounds in a big way. Next on the ambience menu is the room size. You can select between small, medium, and large rooms (it's nice to have the option of pretending to play in a small domed stadium instead of always playing in the big ones). Last on the option list is an overall ambience level for the entire kit. Lower values offer a more subtle effect, and higher values are more obvious.

The equalizer settings are very basic. Controls for altering the tonal quality of the kit are simply a boost or cut of 1-12dB for "high gain" and "low gain." Keep in mind that these adjustments are for the entire kit, not each individual instrument.

Control functions include programming a pad to play a song (called "pad pattern"), the pad pattern playback velocity (the ability to control the volume of the song by the force of the stroke), turning on and off the hi-hat pitch control, setting the MIDI note number, and a pad's gate time.

V-Club Sounds

The Roland TD-6 contains a total of 1,024 drum and percussion sounds that are divided into a number of groups. Below are the group names and the number of sounds contained within the group.

Kick — instruments 1-129
Snare — instruments 130-324
Tom — instruments 325-560
Hi-hat — instruments 561-598

Crash — instruments 599-634
Ride — instruments 635-679
Percussion — instruments 680-810
Special — instruments 811-888
Melodic — instruments 889-920
Voice — instruments 921-971
Reverse — instruments 972-989
Fixed Hi-hat — instruments 990-1023
Off — instrument 1024

consists of a series of buttons arranged into five circles. The circle on the left side contains five buttons for the sequencer controls: click (tempo), play, record, stop, and mute. The circle on the right side contains five more buttons that control the editing functions of the unit: edit, left cursor, right cursor, enter, and exit. Between those two groupings are three buttons that select between song and kit modes, and a shift button that, when used in conjunction with other front-panel commands, alters their function. At the bottom are two large circular buttons that are used for increment, and decrement.

The TD-6 is designed to accept just about any pad or trigger you might want. If you wish to use the brain with other pads, including Roland's mesh head pads, there are easy adjustments for selecting between 12 different pad and trigger types (the manual includes a chart to help you make the proper selection). Once you've

the sounds in the TD6 — and there are plenty of them! (See the sidebar) Roland has always been known for the quality of its electronic drum sounds, and this machine is no exception. The samples are very clean, fresh, and realistic. As might be expected there are a few sounds that won't fit your style, but whatever your style is, you'll find some great timbres. The cymbals are especially good for an electronic kit. Most have long decays, and you've got to listen close to hear any trace of looping or artifacts in the sound. Roland has done a super job in getting the sounds to respond naturally when played at different dynamics. It's not uncommon to hear two or three different samples blending together to create an instrument.

Once you've selected the sound you want to hear, you can adjust the relative volume of that sound in the kit from a value of 0 (no sound) to 127 (maximum level). The pan position adjustment has

Common settings affect the entire drum kit and include the master kit's volume, the pedal hi-hat volume, the pedal range for the hi-hat controller (when using the hi-hat pedal to change the pitch of the pads' sounds), setting the kit's name, kit copy, and drum kit exchange (used to switch the place in the order of any two drum kits).

While not really a programming factor of the drum kits, I've got to mention the metronome functions of the TD-6. It's absolutely simple to use. It has one button to turn off and on, and is quickly adjustable in terms of tempo, level, time signature, interval (subdivisions), sound (20 different timbres including voice counts), pan position, play count-in, and recording count-in. That's a lot of bells and whistles for a metronome, but all are useful.

The Sequencer Section. One of the great features of the TD-6 brain is the ability to play along with pre-recorded songs. It couldn't be easier! Simply press the "song" button, use the increment or decrement buttons to select the song you want, and press the "play" button. Like I've said before, the interface couldn't be

better. If you want to mute the drums out of the track, it's another one-button push. Hitting the dedicated button called "part mute" will kill all the drum sounds, leaving just the backing tracks and the percussion (congas, shakers, etc). What a great tool!

The TD-6 comes complete with 150 preset songs. Most are in the range of 20-30+ measures long and perfectly usable for learning styles and playing along with some great tunes. Styles include rock, metal, ballad, R&B, blues, pop, R&R, jazz fusion, dance, reggae, Latin, Brazil, basic patterns, loops, one shot (rolls and fills), and tap (designed to be played note-by-note from a pad).

If you want to record your drumming, it's a snap. Just push the record button and you're off to the races. If you want to hear yourself playing along with a factory song, it's a little more complicated, but still pretty easy. You first have to copy a factory song into a user location, drop out the drums, and record yourself playing with the V-Club's internal musicians.

The on-board six-track sequencer is dedicated to a drum kit part, a percussion

part, and four backing instrument parts. Each of the backing instrument parts can select an instrument, level, pan position, ambience send level, and bend range. If you want to record your own backing tracks, you're going to have to use an external MIDI keyboard. The sequencer is fairly basic; you won't be able to change time signatures, edit your sequence, or punch in or out. If you're looking for a sequencer to serve as a type of scratch pad for your musical ideas, this one will work just fine. If you're trying to compose your own finished products for live performances, you'd be better served by working with a computer-based sequencer and then synching it to the TD-6's sequencer.

Final Call. The V-Club kit is a great choice for anyone considering an electronic kit. It has just about everything you need. The pads feel fine, the sound set is superb, and the user interface is about the easiest I've ever seen.

Could this be the best value in an electronic drum set — the most bang-for-the-buck in a drum set configuration? I think so. 