

# Crash Test #1

DRUM TECH K2-S KIT

by Norman Weinberg

Many of you remember the pads and pedals distributed by KAT — a small company with a huge reputation for quality and innovation that sadly went out of business a couple of years ago. That's when Drum Tech —

## When the KAT's Away

a company that had manufactured many KAT products — began to market

their pads and pedals on their own. As a result, Drum Tech might still seem like a relatively new name in the market, but actually has been making electronic percussion instruments since 1988.

The company's new kit is a combination of rack-mounted pads and pedals that can be used with a wide variety of trigger-to-MIDI interfaces, drum modules and percussion sound modules. We received the K2-S kit, which includes an RK1 rack (with additional mounting arms), six Flat Pads, one Hat pedal, one Kick Pad bass drum pad, and all the cables and other accessories necessary to get up and running. In addition, the folks at Drum Tech included a Pole Pad and a Rim Pad for review. Although the company makes a dual-trigger snare pad (with separate triggers for the head and rim surfaces), it wasn't available for this review. It should be on the market by the time this issue hits the streets.

**The Flat Pad.** Drum Tech's Flat Pad is a single-surface, single-trigger pad. It accepts a standard 7/8" mounting arm and the molded frame is cut out to accept memory-lock collars. Once the pad is placed on the mounting arm, it is tightened down with two bolts that accept a standard drum key. Once you tighten this pad against the stand, it's not going to move anywhere.

Each pad has two 1/4" phone jacks, and yet it's a mono pad. The two phone jacks can be used to connect two pads into a single input. Simply plug one of the pads into the other pad and then use the second jack to connect to the input of your choice. This way, you can use two different pads to trigger the same sound on your module. The instruction sheet that accompanies the Flat Pad states that "a small drop in pad signal will occur with each additional pad in series." You can compensate for this by increasing the gain settings on your trigger-to-MIDI interface or your drum brain.

Each Flat Pad also has a polarity switch that can be set to work with units made by various manufacturers. The instruction sheet recommends setting the polarity switch to the minus position (-) for Roland and Alesis gear and to the plus position (+) for Yamaha and KAT products.

One of the nice features of the instruction sheet that comes with the Flat Pads is a chart of suggested settings for the Roland TD7, Alesis D4 and DM5 units, the drumKAT EZ, drumKAT 3.5 and the midiKITI. Included in the charts are "best values" and "workable range" values.

The Flat Pad appears to be well constructed. I took one of the pads apart to check on the quality of construction, and was impressed (don't try this at home, since

## RATINGS

- 5 = *Excellent*
- 4 = *Very Good*
- 3 = *Good*
- 2 = *Fair*
- 1 = *Poor*

Flat Pad Playability & Feel: 5  
 Pole Pad Playability & Feel: 5  
 Rim Pad Playability & Feel: 5  
 Kick Pad Playability & Feel: 4  
 Sensitivity: 4.5  
 Construction: 4.5  
 Instruction Manuals: 5  
 Value: 3

**Overall Rating: 4.5**

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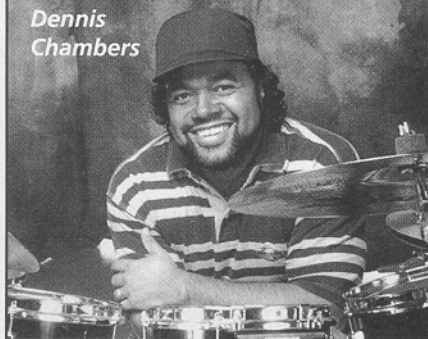


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### SPECS

Complete K2-S Kit  
(six Flat Pads, one Fat pedal, one Hat  
pedal): \$1,699  
Hat Action Trigger Pedal: \$279  
10" Kick Bass Drum  
Trigger Pad: \$229  
10" Single-Zone Flat Pad: \$129  
Rim Pad: \$189  
Pole Pad: \$169  
11" Flat 2 Dual-Zone Pad: \$229

it may be difficult to put back together). The rubber playing surface that wraps around the entire pad is thick and solid. The metal sensing surface is just as sensitive at the outer edges of the pad as in the center. The piezo is large and well soldered onto the sensing plate. In terms of workmanship and materials, the pad seems to be a workhorse. With some intelligent care and handling, it should last a good, long time.

As far as feel is concerned, the Flat Pad has just a little less bounce than a RealFeel practice pad. It doesn't absorb a great deal of the stick's blow and won't transfer the shock of the stroke back into your hand. It's one of the best-feeling electronic drum pads on the market, and the acoustic sound made by your stick hitting the playing surface won't disturb the neighbors.

**The Kick Pad.** This thing is solid! The mounting frame is metal and seems very secure. It can be folded for transport and isn't too heavy or bulky. The Kick Pad looks very similar to the Flat Pad with additional padding on the surface. Like the Flat Pads, the Kick Pad also has two 1/4" jacks. The dual jack allows for chaining one Kick Pad to another, even though the face of the pad can accommodate a double pedal by itself.

Playing the Kick Pad was only slightly less comfortable than playing the Flat Pads. In my opinion, the surface is just a little too soft, absorbing more of the beater ball's impact than my bass drumhead. I realize, however, that this is somewhat subjective. Even so, the pad is more "natural" than any other bass drum pad I've played. The playing surface can be adjusted up or down to accommodate various pedals, and slightly forward or back to adjust for the length of the beater's throw. The pad's supporting framework takes up about 12". To set up your kit facing

against a wall, you'll need a foot clearance behind the bass drum pad.

**The Hat Pedal.** Drum Tech's Hat pedal has three outputs for maximum flexibility: trigger out, connected to a trigger input of your module; footswitch out, connected to the footswitch input of your device; and controller output, connected to the control input of your module. The controller output can be used to control any real-time parameter that your interface, drum module or sound module allows.

Depending on your MIDI percussion system, you can use this output to control the volume, the stereo pan position of a sound, or in most percussion setups, a smooth transition from open to closed hi-hat. The instruction sheet included with the Hat pedal gives detailed setup suggestions for how the pedal should be plugged into the Alesis D4 and DM5, the Roland TD5 and TD7, the Yamaha DTX, and the DrumKAT and TrapKAT. When using this pedal with the Yamaha DTX, you must use the optional DTX Hat Adapter.

The Hat pedal has two heavy-duty velcro strips on the bottom of the pedal in addition to two metal spurs that can be adjusted for depth. If you're setting the Hat pedal on any type of carpeted surface, it's not going to move around at all. In fact, it was difficult to remove from some carpeted surfaces!

This pedal feels great! I loved the way it rebounded after playing a closed hi-hat sound. If only my real hi-hat pedal was this fast! In conjunction with Alternate Mode's DrumKAT and the Yamaha DTX system, the pedal did an admirable job of sensing the position of the footboard between the open and closed position. This ability makes the Hat pedal one of the most responsive and realistic available today.

**The Stand.** The RK1 stand that came with the review kit consists of 1-1/2" chrome, circular tubes. A single, slightly curved horizontal tube holds all of the fittings for the entire kit. This tube connects to two vertical tube legs that each connect to shorter tubes that serve as the feet. Setup is quite easy, and seems to be steady enough to support the kit without the need for cross supports and other strengthening devices.

One of the nice things about this type of stand is that you can easily move it from place to place within a room or studio. Once you've got all the pads mounted the way you want them, and have all the cables velcro-wrapped around the tubes (velcro cable

straps come included with the stand), you can simply unplug the cables from your drum module and move the entire kit single-handedly. Since the mounting arms are outfitted with memory locks on both ends, tearing down and setting up is a snap.

At first, I was concerned that the stand has no additional supports for strength, but in fact, it proved to be quite strong and plenty stable. The plastic T-fittings and arm clamps held steady and the pads didn't move even with heavy playing.

**The Pole Pad.** As you might expect, the Pole Pad is in the shape of a pole (or a tube, if you prefer) that can be mounted using a 1 1/2" T-fitting found on most rack stands or with a multiclamp. On the surface are two wide rubber triggers that stand up from the surface to provide a dual-zone instrument. The two outputs on the Pole Pad are labeled 1/M for monophonic use, which turns both playing surfaces into a single trigger, and 2 for playing each trigger independently.

The Pole Pad's trigger surface is fast. If the Flat Pad is a little slower than a RealFeel pad, then the Pole Pad is faster! The stick seems to fly off the pad's surfaces back into your hand ready for the next stroke. It was comfortable to play this pad with both the

tip of the stick and with the shaft.

**The Rim Pad.** Similar to the Pole Pad, the Rim Pad is also a small, two-zone pad that uses the same FSR technology (force sensing resistors) to eliminate cross-talk between the two surfaces. It is designed to attach to the rim of a snare drum or tom tom so that you can access electronic sounds in close proximity to your acoustic kit. Two small, finger-adjustable screws tighten the metal fittings to the rim. When placed on a 14" snare drum, the Rim Pad covered just over an inch of the head, at the most. The pad felt secure on the drum and didn't loosen during playing. It feels just like the Pole Pad — fast and responsive!

Those of you who play a DrumKAT will be glad to hear that you can attach up to three Rim Pads to this versatile controller (but it's gonna cost you!). You'll also need to purchase the optional mounting bracket accessories, but doing so will add up to six additional surfaces to your DrumKAT (four at the back end and two at the front). The Rim Pad also has suggested settings for the DrumKAT EZ and the DrumKAT 3.5 included with the instruction sheet.

**Final Analysis.** I tested the pads with an Alternate Mode DrumKAT, a Yamaha DTX,

a Yamaha TMX, and an old Yamaha DTS70 trigger-to-MIDI interface. Without exception, all the surfaces worked fine. I have no doubt that the pads would work well with any other brand and model of drum module. The Flat Pad, with the settings tweaked just a touch, could track all but the very softest closed roll. The pad was capable of reading soft strokes at the edge of the pad with nearly the exact same velocity as it has in the center of the pad, making the full surface of the pad usable. I found it easier to control the broad range of dynamics with the Flat Pad than I've found on some other pads. The Pole Pad and Rim Pad worked great for offering additional electronic sounds, and could track even the fastest playing. My only disappointment was in the feel and response of the Kick Pad. A better choice is the company's Fat pedal (foot action trigger).

I'm also a little concerned about some of the prices. For example, the K2S drum kit lists for \$1,699, which is just about the same price as some electronic drum kits that include a drum module. I own a DrumKAT, and like the idea of adding three Rim Pads. But the list price of adding three of them along with the required mounting brackets would be nearly \$650. That's steep. ■