

DIALED IN



**AN ELEGANT
OPTION AT
A COOL GRAND**

KAT

kt3 Digital Drum Set

By Norman Weinberg

There's a new electronic kit in town and it seems to be designed to fall between the "entry-level, price-point-is-king" kits and the "spare-no-expense-or-feature" monster rigs. The 6-piece KAT kt3 offers up some of the most important high-end features: dual-zone drum and cymbal pads that are large enough to give a real-player's feel; plenty of kits (70), sounds (550), and songs (100) that provide all the versatility you might ever need; and both MIDI and USB2 connections to link with the wonderful world of workstation and live performance software. But, instead of offering a host of overly sophisticated and perhaps complicated features that you might never use, the kt3 seems to deliver all the essentials in both the hardware and software

departments. The street price of this kit comes in at about a grand, which puts it in direct competition with some of the other well-known manufacturers' kits.

DETAILS

LIST PRICE \$1,549

FEATURES

Pads Three 11" dual zone, two 9" dual zone, one 9" single zone (kick), two 12" dual zone with choke cymbals, one 14" dual zone without choke, one 12" single zone hi-hat.

Brain 70 kits (45 preset and 25 user), 11 GM kits, 550 drum/percussion sounds, 100 songs, real-time recording, reverb, three-band EQ.

PLENTY O' PADS

With its two-up/two-down configuration, the kt3 offers plenty of playing surfaces to satisfy your creative urges. Our test kit included

INPUT/OUTPUT Nine trigger inputs on custom plug, two additional trigger inputs, headphones, aux input, stereo/mono output, USB 2.0, MIDI in, MIDI out.

Rack Metal tubes with plastic fittings.

CONTACT



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11" pads for the snare and two lower toms, 9" mounted toms, and a 9" kick tower (large enough to accommodate a double pedal).

Snare and tom pads are capable of triggering two separate sounds on the head and hoop. The ride cymbal is 14" in diameter, while the two crashes and the hi-hat pads are 12". kt3 crashes offer dual zones on the bell and bow with choke capability (choking the cymbal sends aftertouch over MIDI), while the ride features the same two zones without the choking option. The hi-hat, in conjunction with the controller pedal, can respond to open, half-open, closed, and pedal closed positions, and can even be splashed. That's about all you need from a good hi-hat controller.

These pads are rubber and are actually a little quieter than some other rubber pads I've played — an important consideration for those who want a practice kit for their apartment or dorm room. Even the bass drum beater-ball is customized for quiet operation (although a bass drum pedal is not included in kits sold in the USA).

I liked the feel of the pads. Not too hard and not too soft — sort of the Goldilocks of electronic pads. Their white color is a nice change from the formal black you see everywhere.

I detected no crosstalk between the rims and the pads. I played the rim sound as hard as I could and never got any signal from the head sound. I occasionally experienced some crosstalk between the right-hand crash cymbal and the lowest tom (obviously being transmitted through the rack), but a quick adjustment of the pad's controls quickly solved that issue.

STURDY RACK

KAT combined metal tubes and plastic fittings to construct the kt3 rack — but don't worry about the plastic parts. The plastic seems to be of high quality and provides a stability that ensures that your instruments stay put.

The rack design is typical for a kit this size with cross-braces across the front and sides and an arm that holds the snare pad. Pad mounts are adjustable along the length of the tube and can rotate to dial in a comfortable angle. All three cymbal mounts come with boom arms for additional placement options. The kick tower is free standing — you'll want to use a pedal with stage pegs to prevent the unit from sliding away.

A cable harness connects the pads to the brain, and includes connections for nine of the inputs, with individual jacks for Tom 4 and Crash 2. With each of the cables clearly labeled and cut to logical lengths, the rack's connections are clean and easy. The kit comes with a few Velcro cable ties so that you can cinch up the cables to the rack, making an even sleeker visual presentation. And speaking of the eye-ball factor — between the brushed aluminum finish of the piping, stark white pads, and



bright red cymbal boom adaptors and wing nuts, this setup sets itself apart.

INSIDE THE BRAIN

The kt3's brain is clear and clean with the various areas of adjustment grouped together into clusters. On the top half of the unit, you'll find the power button grouped with the volume knob; the sequence start/stop buttons grouped with the save button; and the programming buttons grouped with the page/select button. The bottom half groups tempo, play/practice, and utility buttons together on the right, and the click, record, and drum off buttons on the left. In the center, you'll find specific instrument select buttons for each drum and cymbal pad in the kit.

Global edits affect the entire kit rather than each individual sound. These controls are used to set the overall kit volume, turning the built-in reverb on or off, and a three-band EQ with adjustments for high, middle, and low frequencies.

Each voice can be edited in terms of its instrument, volume, pan position, pitch (over a -8 to +8 range), and reverb amount. While this isn't a huge number of variables, all of the absolutely necessary tweaks are here.

SOUNDS & SONGS

The kt3 has enough memory for 550 individual sounds, subdivided into 56 kicks, 85 snares, 165 toms, 38 rides, 118 crashes, 64 percussion sounds, and 23 different hi-hats. All these sounds are combined into 70 different kits, including 45 presets programmed at the factory that can't be edited. The other 25 are user kits that offer a variety of programming options. As you might expect, the kits are designed to cover a wide range of traditional musical styles including rock, funk, jazz, pop, and blues, as well as newer styles like dubstep, house, breakbeat, and hip-hop.

If you plan to use the kt3 as an external sound module for a computer or other MIDI/USB controller, you'll find 11 different General MIDI drum sets and the full complement of General MIDI backing instruments.

Just about every electronic kit now comes with a series of play-along songs for practice. The kt3 is no exception with 100 different songs, 20 beats, 12 rhythms, and 10 different patterns.

You can specify a particular pad to operate as a song "start and stop" toggle. In general, the songs included in the kt3 brain aren't as long and complicated as some on higher-end kits, but that's to be expected at this price point.

There are some additional features that could be used to help develop a drummer's sense of time and rhythmic accuracy, but I found this feature to be a little too easy for all but the most basic beginners. If you're truly a novice, this can be a big help, but for those who are already gigging, you needn't bother.

The quality and usefulness of any sound or sound set is truly in the ear of the beholder, but I've got to say that I was taken with the overall quality of the sounds for a kit at this price. Noteworthy were the bass drum and snare drum samples. While the others were good, these really struck me as sounds that were special. On the other hand, the GM sounds that are used for the backing tracks in the play-along songs were somewhat thin and very "synthy" sounding. These tracks sound okay for personal practice, but they're not going to win any awards for authenticity.

It's important that a kit coming in at this price have a series of controls that help you mold its response and feel to your exact preferences. A custom fit means that the instrument plays in a natural manner, giving you a pleasing performing experience. The "Utility" area lets you adjust each pad in terms of sensitivity, threshold, cross-talk, velocity curve, and rim sensitivity. There is also an adjustment for the hi-hat splash sensitivity. With this amount of flexibility, you should be able to tailor the kt3 to your liking. 

VERDICT

Really now — six drum pads and four cymbal pads, most with dual zones, offering up 18 playable surfaces. With MIDI and USB, this is about the least expensive way I know to get a fully professional recording or live-performance rig that isn't a toy. Granted, the kt3 isn't the most full-featured or sophisticated e-kit on the market, but I don't think KAT set out to make this unit its flagship instrument.

Combine the kt3 with a laptop running a high-end percussion library (such as BDF3), and you'll have a killer system. Or MIDI the kt3 into your classic drum machine and mix the sounds from the kit together with the sounds from the machine.

I don't see how you can go wrong with this kit. You get lots of surfaces, solid construction, a strong drum and percussion sound set, and all the essentials for practicing, playing live, or using it as a drum set controller in a recording situation.