

sustain, and can be adjusted to lengthen or shorten the vibration time. It's also of very sturdy construction and can really take a pounding. Believe me, I put it through the ringer trying to attain the longest vibrato.

Another plus is the lightweight plastic guiro, available in a bright red color. At \$54, it has a nice balance with its rubber-lined finger holes. There are three different sets of grooves to use, each with its own unique timbre. The sound is a little thin, but if you use a skinnier scraper stick than what comes with the product, like a Chinese chopstick, you can get a nicer tone. The accompanying stick is too thick and not very dense.

Unfortunately, two items that aren't up to par with the standards of the other Crown Percussion accessories are the 6" triangle and bar chimes. A bit costly at \$28 and \$99, respectively – there are other less expensive and better sounding options on the market. Both the triangle and chimes have a very metallic sound to them, but the chimes have a lot of overtones that give them a tinny and poorly matched tonality. Perhaps attaching a dampening bar might help alleviate some of the unwanted overtones. The truth of the matter is that they just don't sound very good. Quality of metal, type of metal, diameter, length, cost, all play into the making of good chimes, and then some.

It's the same story with the triangle – tinny with overtones. Additionally, the provided beater is heavy enough to put dents in the triangle. If you hit a piece of metal with another piece of metal, and they are close to the same diameter, you're going to get dents, for sure. The triangle itself has poor sustain and pitch.

THE VERDICT. As a total percussion package, for beginners, amateurs, and even professionals, the entire line of Crown Percussion by Remo is, for the most part, an attractive assembly of instruments. Without question, the congas, bongos, and accompanying stands are a tremendous bang-for-buck deal. The addition of the Fiberskyn 3 heads makes all the difference in the world for these drums, which sound terrific. With the conga's large-hand caveat aside, beginning-to-aspiring professional congueros will have no problem enjoying these drums for jamming, grooving, and even gigging, too. It would be nice to see further development in this line regarding pricing and expansion of quality accessories.

YAMAHA DTXPLORER ELECTRONIC DRUM KIT

E-DRUMS FOR EVERYONE

by Norman Weinberg

DETAILS

MODEL: Yamaha DTXplorer Electronic Drum Kit
MSRP: \$1,059
INCLUDED PADS: TP65 (5); PCY65 (2); KP65 (1)
SOUND ENGINE: 16-bit AWM2
MAXIMUM POLYPHONE: 32 notes
INSTRUMENTS: 192 drum and percussion sounds
DRUM KITS: 42 (32 factory, 10 user)
SONGS: 22 (2 demo songs, 20 pattern songs)
TEMPO RANGE: 30-300
TRIGGER SETUPS: 5 (4 factory, 1 user)

DISPLAY: 16 x 2 backlit LCD
INPUTS: 9 trigger inputs (1, 5, 6 are stereo; 2, 3, 4, 7 are mono, 8/9 for kick), 1 hi-hat controller input, aux input (stereo mini jack)
OUTPUTS: Stereo output, headphone output, MIDI out
INCLUDED: Rack, Brain Mounting Bracket, FP-6110 Bass Drum Pedal
CONTACT: Yamaha, P.O. Box 6600, Buena Park, CA 90622.
 714-522-9011, yamahadrums.com



Great sounds at a miniscule price

Aimed at the lower end of the electronic percussion market, the DTXplorer is a fully functional, self-contained, 5-piece kit with a suggested list price coming in at just over a grand. A complete package with a rack stand, and pads for the snare, kick, three toms, hi-hat, ride, and crash cymbals, the kit even comes with its own FP-6110 strap-drive bass drum pedal. The only things you'll need to get up and running is about 20 minutes to put the kit together, something to sit on, a set of headphones, and a pair of sticks.

The rack stand is lightweight, but plenty sturdy. The hollow aluminum tubes are ribbed so that the pad mounts grab tight and hold their position, even under some extreme bashing. There's a single horizontal pipe that holds both of the mounted toms as well as the cymbal rods. Don't look for anything fancy here; the cymbal rods have tilters, but are not equipped with boom arms. All the other pads are mounted on three more arms that extend out from the vertical supports. The hi-hat and the controller are mounted on one tube, while the snare and the floor tom each have their own mounting arms. There are two large tubes with large rubber feet that serve as the base, keeping the entire rig well grounded. Hooking up the cables is easy—the cables are clearly labeled and grouped together to form a customized snake.

One might expect that this entry-level kit would sacrifice various bells, whistles, and setup flexibility to hit this particular price point. While the pad mounts are pretty basic, they're very well constructed and easy to adjust. I have to admit that I was able to put the pads in a more comfortable playing position quicker than I've been able to with some of the most expensive racks on the market. Sometimes, added features and fancy attachments can get in the way of a comfortable setup.

PADS. All of the DTXplorer pads are single-zone. The TP65 pads that serve as the snare, three toms, and hi-hats are 6.5" in diameter. While this compact size might seem small at first glance, I had no trouble getting situated behind the kit. If you take your time to position the pads in a logical manner, it's easy to emulate the physical positioning of an acoustic kit. Both the ride and crash cymbals are PCY65 pads. Their wedge shape means that the pad's own weight prevents the instrument from spinning out of position. The bottoms of

the cymbal pads have recessed level controls to adjust their output. The drum and cymbal pads are well made, and feel solid both in your hands and under your sticks. I found that the rubber's stick rebound felt good, tracked well, and offered a responsive and comfortable surface.

The KP65 bass drum pad is lightweight, but solid. It has got a surface just large enough to accommodate a double pedal, and a set of retractable spurs. There's a trigger input for connecting another pad and a level knob to fine-tune the signal's output. Pad creep is kept in check by a huge Velcro strip and two retractable spurs. The HH65 hi-hat controller, along with the hi-hat pad, tracks fully open, fully closed, and on foot-closed notes, as well as foot splashes. The "throw" of the footboard is adjustable to offer a tighter or looser hi-hat feel, and the pedal has both rubber strips and spurs that can be screwed down to prevent creeping.

While all of the pads on the test kit are monophonic (unable to read separate trigger notes on the rims of the pads or cymbals), the brain can accept signals from stereo pads. The snare input will read the triggers from Yamaha's TP65S three-zone pad (head, rim, crossstick). Likewise, the two cymbal inputs will read the PCY65S signals allowing for a stereo signal for cymbal chokes.

BRAIN. The Xplorer's brain packs a lot of power inside its diminutive package. The front panel has only a few buttons and the interface is totally simple. There are five function buttons that serve double duty when you hold down the shift button: Drum Kit/Trigger; Click/Groove Check; Song/Mute; Metronome On-Off/Tap Tempo; and Save-Enter/Utility. Inside each function are additional screens that give you control of the brain's programming. The front panel also sports a large jog dial for changing values quickly, a pair of select buttons to move from page to page in the editing screens, and a 16 x 2 backlit LCD display. At the back of the brain are the trigger inputs (eight in all), hi-hat control input, stereo outputs, headphone output, auxiliary input, and the main volume control. There's also a MIDI output, but no MIDI input.

KITS. The Xplorer comes with 32 factory kits that cover most contemporary music sounds (acoustic, techno, rock, jazz,

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and a number of special effect and world music kits). If one of the factory kits doesn't quite fit the bill, fear not, you can design your own from scratch.

Creating your own user kit is easy and rewarding. Any of the inputs (and if you're using stereo pads for the snare or cymbals, rim positions) can be assigned any of the 192 drum and percussion sounds in the machine. These sounds are assigned to seven different categories: 17 kick drums, 41 snares, 24 toms, 23 cymbals, 20 hi-hats, 41 percussion sounds, and 26 effect sounds. All are high quality and you should easily find sounds that fit your needs. After all, these sounds are basic building blocks that can still be edited to create your own individual sonic style.

Once you've selected the sound, you can adjust the relative volume, pitch (over a four-octave range in ten-cent increments), stereo pan position (127 values from L64 to R63), and reverb type. The Xplorer also comes with a number of reverb options, including five halls (larger values offer stronger effects), five rooms, five stages, plate, white, tunnel, and basement. Each sound can have its own reverb level so that the relationship of dry to wet can be adjusted for each pad.

There are also editing screens for decay, filter cut-off frequency, alternate group (nine groups!), and MIDI key on/off. This last feature is pretty cool if you plan to use the Xplorer's brain to interface with a computer. MIDI note-off messages are ignored in "normal" mode. You can control loops in "hold" mode, as each stroke switches from note-on to note-off. The last choice is a predetermined gate time that can be set from 0.0-9.9 seconds in .1-second increments.

There are only ten user kit locations, which you might find somewhat limiting if you enjoy creating and playing unique combinations of instruments. Since the Xplorer has no MIDI input, it isn't possible to dump off the internal memory with System Exclusive messages and bring them back into the machine at a later time. However, since this kit is aimed at the entry-level user, many owners will be totally satisfied with the factory kits or playing with only a few custom kits.

Trigger adjustments on the Xplorer are well implemented. The unit comes from the factory with four trigger setups stored in memory: Medium, the normal setting; Dynamic, with a wide dynamic range;

Easy, which averages irregular trigger levels; and DT10/20, designed for use with Yamaha's acoustic triggers. If you want to create a trigger set from scratch or tweak a factory setting, you've got plenty of options. You can assign any one of over 20 different pad and trigger types, adjust the gain and minimum velocity, and select one of five different velocity curves. To help alleviate potential problems with crosstalk and false triggering, each pad has a self-rejection setting, a general rejection setting, and specific rejection level. That pretty much covers all the bases.

EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS. The DTXplorer comes with 22 songs for play-along practice, all of which include the drum parts as well as full accompaniment with bass, keyboards, brass, and other instruments that make up a full composition. When you call up a new song, the kit automatically changes to an appropriate style, although you can override this feature and call up any kit to play along with the songs.

Of course, you can mute the drum track so that you can practice playing along with the sequenced song without the pre-programmed track, and there's even a new feature that lets you mute everything but the bass. The company suggests that you can use this feature to "concentrate on improving your ability to play in rhythm with the bass instrument." Certainly true, and it offers more variation to your practice routine.

The 22 songs themselves cover the most common styles that drummers would experience. There are two full demo songs, four rock songs, a shuffle, two funk tunes, two dance tunes, soul, hip-hop, two pop songs, blues, reggae, jazz, ballad, samba, bossa, and Latin.

The Xplorer's metronome can pull off some pretty fancy tricks. The brain holds 30 different user-defined "click sets," and each can be programmed for tempo, clicks per measure (1-9), and the relative volume of five different rhythms. You can adjust the volume of the downbeat, quarter-notes, off-beat eighths, off-beat sixteenths, and off-beat triplets to one of nine different levels. For the audio output of your click set, you can select between six pre-programmed sounds (metronome, wood block, percussion, agogo, stick, pulse), or you can create your own.

Additionally, you can set the relationship between the number of measures and the number of "break" measures. Using this feature, you could set up an eight-bar phrase that has the metronome drop out for the last bar – a great tool for practicing fills and developing a solid groove.

If you want to set the metronome's tempo by ear or feel rather than by number, you can go into the tap tempo function and have the brain read strokes from a pad or read the increment/decrement buttons from the front panel.

Yamaha has incorporated its "groove check" feature on many recent kits, which lets you visually check your accuracy when playing along with one of the internal songs or the metronome. The Xplorer also includes a new feature called "rhythm gate," with easy, normal, and pro settings that require increasing precision and accuracy in your playing. If you don't hit the pad within the timing window, the audio is muted and you won't hear the stroke. While the original groove check offers visual feedback of timing, the rhythm gate offers another level of audio feedback. Using both of these tools is a powerful way to improve your sense of time and control.

THE VERDICT. Yamaha made the hard decisions that were necessary to bring the unit's price down to this point. And while it would be easy to make a wish list of features that could be added, each additional feature would likely raise the price. There is no doubt that the DTXplorer is going to put the power of e-drumming into the hands of many more players than ever before.

Clearly, Yamaha aimed this kit at the novice or entry-level user, but more experienced drummers should consider it for the sounds, portability, and quiet pads. It would make a great kit for apartment practice, band practice, and even as an electronic expansion to an acoustic kit in live performances. If you're a beginner, this kit offers everything you need – both as an instrument and as a tool to improve your playing – at an affordable price. One suggestion: if you buy this kit, upgrade the snare pad to the TP65S. Then you'll be able to play rimshots and cross sticks.

The Xplorer won't compete with a kit selling for three times the price, but isn't intended to. The bottom line is that it feels good, sounds good, and is well made.