

Roland RMP-3 And RMP-5 Rhythm Coaches



Want the correct time? The RMP-5 (above) and RMP-3 (below) will deliver.

TIME AFTER TIME

BY **NORMAN WEINBERG**

One of my most memorable experiences is of being called into the control room to listen to the playback of a track my band just recorded. The producer (highly respected, experienced, and with a golden track record) asked me, "What's wrong with that fill?" I told him that it sounded fine to me. He responded, "It rushed! That instrument isn't that hard to play. If you don't have time, you don't have anything I want." After a few weeks of severe depression, I bought three metronomes: an electric Franz that stayed at home near my kit, a windup Yamaha pendulum unit that I kept in my locker, and a super-mini Taktell for my stick bag. I soon realized that this was one of the most valuable lessons in my musical career. If you don't play in the pocket, you're simply not going to get the big gigs. Roland's new Rhythm Coach units will help you find that pocket and stay there. These new machines make practicing more fun by offering interactive experiences that can challenge both the novice and the professional.

IN GENERAL

Roland's Rhythm Coaches are much more than old-fashioned metronomes that give a straight, mechanical, boring click. In fact, if you're looking for a metronome, I can't really recommend these machines, as you'll only be using a small portion of their power and capability.

Both the RMP-3 and the RMP-5 feature an 8" mesh head. There are eight tuning lugs to adjust the head's tension. Adjusting the tension does affect the feel and response of the head and the contact sound that is heard when the pad is played with sticks.

Roland made the wise decision to place the sensor at the furthest edge of the playing surface rather than in the middle of the head. This means that you're not going to strike directly on the sensor. This pad is likely the most sensitive that I have ever played. To be honest, I had a difficult time playing a stroke that was soft enough to be missed by the sensor. If you want to practice your rhythmic control at a *ppp*-dynamic level, you'll be able to do it on this surface! At first, I tightened the head so much that the rebound was just a little too live to be natural. Dropping the tension a bit made the surface respond in a much more natural manner.

The display on each unit is well organized and clean, giving you all the information you need at a glance, as well as the ability to see the beat by both a pendulum-style display and flashing lights. Both machines are very easy to program. The large Metronome and Coach buttons, as well as the Start/Stop and the Value buttons, make it quick and easy to navigate through all the available functions.

You can play these on your lap, a tabletop, or mounted on a stand. I did most of my playing by sitting cross-legged on the floor with the pad in front of me. Roland recommends their PDS-2 stand, but just about any solid stand with an M8 thread size should work just fine. Because the machines can run under battery power (a single 9-volt), you can take them out to the beach, forest, or mountains and commune with nature while ramming your single strokes, hertas, or eggbeater combinations. If you don't need the portability, an AC adaptor is available at additional cost.

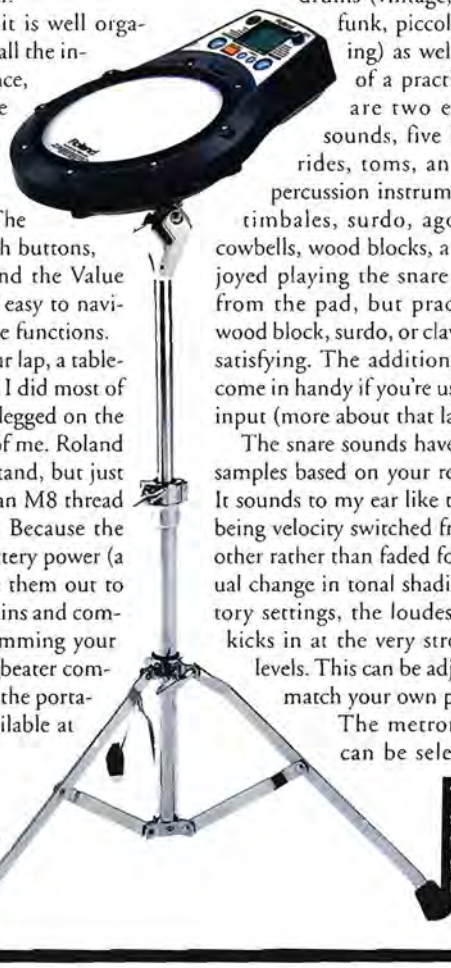
RMP-5

The pad can be programmed to trigger one of 54 different sounds. There are six snare

DETAILS

MODEL Roland RMP-3	MODEL Roland RMP-5
PRICE \$119	PRICE \$279
PAD SIZE 8"	PAD SIZE 8"
PAD SOUNDS 1	PAD SOUNDS 54
CLICK SOUNDS 5	CLICK SOUNDS 15
TEMPO 20–260 BPM	TEMPO 20–300 BPM
RHYTHM TYPES 18	RHYTHM TYPES 24
PATTERNS 0	PATTERNS 22
BEATS 24	BEATS 24
RHYTHM COACH FEATURES Time Check: 4 variations Quiet Count: 6 variations Auto Up/Down: 5 variations Rhythmic Notes: 3 variations Stoke Balance: 2 variations	RHYTHM COACH FEATURES Time Check: 8 variations Accuracy Score: 4 variations Quiet Count: 6 variations Auto Up/Down: 6 variations Rhythmic Notes: 3 variations Stoke Balance: 2 variations
INPUTS AC adaptor, mix in	INPUTS AC adaptor, mix in, external trigger in (dual)
OUTPUTS Headphones (mono mini jack)	OUTPUTS Headphones (stereo mini jack)
STAND SCREW SIZE M8	STAND SCREW SIZE M8
WEIGHT 2lbs 11oz (1.3kg)	WEIGHT 2lbs 14oz (1.3kg)

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Those Roland smarties even made them stand mountable

drums (vintage, brass, bright, funk, piccolo, and marching) as well as the sound of a practice pad! There are two electric snare sounds, five kicks, hi-hats, rides, toms, and a variety of percussion instruments including timbales, surdo, agogo, triangle, cowbells, wood blocks, and more. I enjoyed playing the snare drum sounds from the pad, but practicing with a wood block, surdo, or clave was not very satisfying. The additional sounds will come in handy if you're using the trigger input (more about that later).

The snare sounds have three distinct samples based on your relative volume. It sounds to my ear like the samples are being velocity switched from one to another rather than faded for a more gradual change in tonal shading. At the factory settings, the loudest sample only kicks in at the very strongest playing levels. This can be adjusted to better match your own playing style.

The metronome's sound can be selected from 15

different timbres, including the traditional metronome sound, electric metronome, beep, cowbell, claves, sticks, voice (yes, the robotic numbers), hand clap, finger snap, closed hi-hat, hi-hat pedal, ride, triangle, agogo, and tambourine.

The metronome is also capable of playing 20 different rhythmic patterns – from the usual whole-, half-, quarter-, and eighth-note patterns to more sophisticated rhythmic combinations such as quintuplets, sextuplets, and septuplets. In addition, you can have the metronome play son and rumba clave patterns in either 2:3 or 3:2 formats. If that wasn't enough, there are 22 other rhythmic patterns such as a drum shuffle, jazz ride, or samba figures. Obviously, these multiple variations present a slew of options.

The pad and the metronome are certainly cool, but what make these machines truly unique are the following coaching tools.

TIME CHECK. In Time Check mode, your relative timing to the click appears in the display. Time check is active nearly all the time. If you play with the click, a little "good" bar lights up in the middle of the display. If you play ahead of the click, a series of arrows lights in front of the box. Playing behind the click lights the arrows on the other side of the box. The position of the arrow (three degrees early and three degrees late) gives you an indication how far ahead or behind you are in relation to the click. There are eight different time check modes. There's

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an "easy" and a "hard" version of quarter-notes, eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes, and sixteenth-note triplets. The exact nature of the timing isn't mentioned in the manual, but I can attest to the fact that a tighter timing is absolutely required at the harder settings.

ACCURACY SCORE. Once you've selected the Time Check mode, you can ask the RMP-5 to actually score your performance. After a two-bar count-off, the machine will check your playing accuracy over a 4-, 8-, 16-, or 32-bar phrase. When the phrase is complete, a score is shown on the display. If you score in the 80-percent to 90-percent range, a little voice says, "Good." Scoring in the 90-percent to 100-percent range gives you an "excellent."

QUITE COUNT. In Quite Count mode, the metronome sound will alternate between high and low volume levels. This is a great tool to test your ability to hold time steady without the metronome. The trick is to see if you're with the click when the volume returns to an audible level. Quiet mode has six variations: one-, two-, four-, and eight-bar cycles; three bars plus one quite bar (great for one measure fills), and six bars combined with two quite bars.



AUTO UP/DOWN. This mode is designed to improve your speed and playing stamina by increasing and decreasing the tempo between ranges you set. There are a number of variations to this coach as well. There's one that increases one bpm on every beat, one that increases one bpm every two beats, two bpm for every eight measures, and five bpm for every eight measures. But wait, there's more! One changes tempo every eight bars, but the amount of change increases as the tempo gets faster. The last option is called Speed Check. In this mode,

if you play correctly for eight measures, the machine will advance by five bpm until it reaches its maximum tempo (300 bpm). If you don't play correctly, the tempo remains the same for another eight-measure phrase.

RHYTHMIC NOTES. This mode is based on the traditional warm-up exercise of increasing the number of divisions per beat. For example, moving from quarter-notes to eighth-notes to eighth-note triplets to sixteenth-notes to quintuplets, and so on. Three variations step up and then back down in two-measure groups. One moves from half notes to sixteenths, one from half notes to sixteenth triplets, and one from half notes to septuplets.

STROKE BALANCE. This function checks the relative balance between your right and left hands (or between strokes in the same hand). As you play, the metronome's needle changes position to indicate the level of the stroke. There are two variations to this feature. One keeps the needle on screen after the stroke and the other clears the needle off the screen right after the stroke.

If you enjoy playing along to recordings, you'll be pleased to learn that the RMP-5



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VERDICT

Though it's extra bucks, the RMP-5 is a better value. Even if you don't think that you'll be using the trigger input features of the RMP-5, I think that you'll find the practice experience more pleasurable. And that means that you'll be using the rhythm coach more often. The ability to hear more pleasing snare or percussion sounds rather than the plunk of the pad makes a huge difference. The variety of metronome sounds is also a plus when practicing for a long time. Since the RMP-3 only does a time check against the quarter-note, its coaching usefulness is much more limited. The additional patterns and rhythms means that the RMP-5 is much more flexible. If you look at these units as sophisticated metronomes, they're expensive. If you approach them as teachers and drill sergeants, they're a bargain. If you use them on a regular basis, you'll be a better player. It's that simple.

comes with a mix-input jack. Here you can connect your iPod, CD player, or any other audio source. There is no mix volume control, so you'll have to adjust the volume from your source device, but that's not a big drawback.

There's also an input for an external trigger. This allows the RMP-5 to be used along with one stereo or two mono pads (think about a cymbal pad and a kick drum trigger for a complete mini-electronic drum kit). In this way, you could also use all the rhythm coach features for your feet as well as your hands. The unit contains all the necessary programming functions to be certain that your external triggers will respond correctly. There are controls for setting the trigger

type, sensitivity, threshold, velocity curve, scan time, retrigger cancel, crosstalk cancel, mask time, rim sensitivity, and rim gain. That's a pretty complete picture of a high-end trigger interface!

Other features include the ability to adjust the RMP-5 pad's sensitivity to one of 16 different levels depending on how strongly you hit. The factory setting of 5 forced me to really slam to get the strongest level when working with the stroke balance feature. I changed the value to 7, and felt that the unit responded more to my personal playing style. There's also a command to bring the entire unit back to its factory settings. This can be very useful if you've messed up your trigger settings and want to start from scratch.

RMP-3

The RMP-3 was released in early 2005. At about 120 bucks less than the newer version, what are you giving up? For starters, the RMP-3 isn't capable of playing different sounds from the pad. There's a small pickup inside the unit that amplifies the sound of the stick striking the surface of the mesh head, and that's it. The time check feature of the RMP-3 only checks the rhythm of the quarter note. If you play the quarter notes in time, but rush the inner sixteen notes, the RMP-3 won't catch it. The other big feature missing on the RMP-3 is the external trigger input.

There are a few of the other differences between the two units (depending on your needs, they may be minor or more significant). Here's a list: the RMP-3's metronome only goes up to 260 bpm rather than 300 bpm, there are 18 rhythm types rather than 24, 5 rather than 15 metronome sounds, no patterns, no Speed Check variation in Auto Up/Down mode, and a mono rather than stereo headphone output. However, according to Roland, you'll get slightly longer battery life out of this unit (six hours on an alkaline battery rather than four hours from the RMP-5).

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