

DIALED IN

Yamaha DTX950K

By Norman Weinberg

For the past several years, Yamaha has been working to recapture a slice of its once formidable positioning in the electronic drum market. Meanwhile, other companies have been gaining ground with innovative advancements that brought the feel and sensitivity of electronic pads closer to that of acoustic drums — mesh heads are the big change that come to mind. But the introduction of Yamaha's new T.C.S. pad for its top-of-the-line DTX900K machine could very well change everything.

THE PADS

The DTX950K comes with a 12" snare pad, two 10" tom pads, and two 12" tom pads. The big news

is Yamaha's new playing surface. Called "T.C.S." (Textured Cellular Silicone), it's manufactured using a proprietary process that injects small air bubbles into a silicone material. Using different ratios of air to silicone, Yamaha has made the snare pad with a little more responsive stick bounce than the toms, and you can really feel this difference in your hands.

These pads felt really good, and their ability to track my softest stroke was truly impressive. I had to really pound to hit the ceiling where the pad/brain combination was outputting the maximum sound. In terms of feel, they have less rebound than a gum rubber pad, and maybe just a little less than an acoustic drumhead. The silicone playing

surface floats, and there's a bit of give to the entire mechanism, resulting in a familiar sense of stroke when playing. The feel is not exactly the same as an acoustic instrument, but it's a huge improvement for Yamaha and I feel that many players will like this environment as well as, or better than, mesh-head pads.

For those of you who are concerned about the acoustic volume of the stick making contact with the head and the rim, you'll be glad to know that these new pads are very quiet. If a near-silent electronic kit is a necessity, you'll have to check it out in person, but I can tell you that Yamaha is now competitive with any other manufacturer.

Each drum pad has two different rim triggers and Yamaha's exclusive "pad controller" knob. One of the first things I do when reviewing new pads is to check for crosstalk. There was none! I assigned three totally different sounds to the head and the two rim triggers so that I could easily tell if striking one surface caused the others to fire — no matter how softly. I could not hear any crosstalk within a pad itself, or carried through the rack from one pad to another.

I found the on-board pad controllers very cool. The pad controller knob can be used to adjust the sound of the snares (on/off, tight/loose), the pitch of the toms, the tempo of the song playback or click, or the filter cut-off that causes a change in the tonal character of the voice.

The cymbal pads have been carried over from the "DTXtreme III Special" (reviewed in the April 2009 issue of DRUM!) Since they were introduced less than

two years ago, it's no wonder Yamaha didn't redesign them. Now, as before, the cymbals respond well and I didn't have any problems with crosstalk between the playing areas. Another item held over from the DTXtreme III Special: the HXR4LD hex-style rack. It's highly adjustable and solid as a rock.

THE BRAIN

The DTX900 brain is a beast. But once you take a look at it, the layout is actually very clear, well organized, and ergonomically designed. The machine is very similar to the DTXtreme III brain. In fact, if you already own a DTXtreme III, you can hop onto dtxdrums.com and download a firmware update that will essentially turn your older brain into the newest model. How cool is that?

The programming organization is hierarchical, with the mode buttons sitting at the top level, the function buttons under the modes, and the sub-functions at the lower end. This type of programming structure means that the most often-used controls are only a couple of button pushes away. It works well and keeps things simple.

When you look around the back, you'll find 15 trigger inputs (13 inputs that handle stereo signals for dual- and triple-zone pads) and one designed for two monophonic signals (think dual bass drums). Other inputs include a hi-hat controller and an auxiliary/sampling input. Outputs include the main stereo L/R outs along with six individual outs, a headphone output, and a S/P DIF digital out. MIDI in and out as well as USB in and out round out the connectivity options.

DETAILS

FEATURES T.C.S. (Textured Cellular Silicone) pads; three-zone drum and cymbal pads; dual-zone hi-hat pad; single-zone bass drum pad with additional input; 205MB internal sound set; 512MB max sampling capability; highly advanced click/metronome functions with rhythmic training functions; sequencer with 480 ppq; sophisticated MIDI input and output; USB in and out.

PADS: 1-XP120SD, 2-XP100T, 2-XP120T, 1-PCY155, 2-PCY135, 1-RHH-135, 1-KP125W

STANDS: HXR4LD rack, SS662 snare stand, HS740A hi-hat stand

BRAIN: DTX900

SOUNDS: 64-note polyphony, 1,115 drum voices, 211 melodic voices

KITS: 50 preset, 50 user, up to 1,584 external

CHAINS: 64 with 64 steps each

SONGS: 3 demo, 44 practice, 40 pad, 50 user, up to 99 external

EFFECTS: Reverb (9), Chorus (19), Variation (51), Inserts (51), Master (9), EQ (5 band)

SEQUENCER: 152k notes, 480 ppq resolution, 2 tracks (16 MIDI channels each).

BUILT-IN SONGS: 87 (3 demo songs, 44 practice songs, 40 pad songs)

LIST PRICE \$8,699.99

CONTACT
Yamaha Corporation Of America
yamahadrums.com
714-522-9011



QR CODE
Scan with a smart phone to go directly to the manufacturer's Web site.



RAISING THE E-DRUM BAR (AGAIN)

THE EXPERIENCE

The architecture of the DTX900 brain is a little more complex due to the flexibility of mixing and matching sounds and samples. The lowest level is the "Drum Voice." In all, there are 1,115 percussion sounds that comprise a complete selection of kicks, snares, toms, and cymbals. There's also a large component of percussion and special-effects sounds along with 211 melodic voices to round out the sonic palette. Any of these individual sounds can be assigned to a single-zone pad like the bass drum, or any position on a dual-zone or triple-zone pad. To my ear, these sounds are killer!

The 900 offers 50 factory kits that include the Yamaha Oak Custom, Birch Custom, Maple Custom, and Beech Custom instruments. Other kits include stylistically typical sounds for hip-hop, '80s, house, jazz, punk, R&B, old-school, hard rock, and several more styles. If you want to create your own kits, there

are 50 on-board user locations, with the ability to store another 1,584 kits on an external USB storage device. Let's put it this way: You're not going to run out of kits.

When making your own modifications to a kit, you have a choice of adjusting the trigger input jack or each trigger input source. This makes it easy to fine-tune the whole pad at once or quickly alter individual elements of a pad. Modifications include changes in volume, tuning (over a four-octave range), reverb send, chorus send, variation send, wet/dry mix, pan position, and output (mains or individual outs).

The tone controls are numerous and also can be aimed at the entire input or each source within the input. Adjustments include low, mid, and high frequency positions with their own gains levels, mid Q, attack, decay, release, low-pass filter, and low-pass Q.

There are six main audio effect blocks on the DTX900 brain. A Master Effect and a

Master EQ can be applied to the final stereo output that will affect every sound and kit in the entire machine. Two insertion blocks (A and B) can be applied to the audio signal coming in to the DTX900. This input with the effect could be used for external audio, a microphone, or your sampling source. The Reverb, Chorus, and Variation effects can be called up for each individual kit. Each of these blocks has sophisticated flexibility in routing.

Most high-end kits allow for stacking and alternate functions — placing more than one sound on a pad or having the pad alternate between sounds on successive strokes. On the 900, these features are insane! You can alternate up to 100 sounds under a single input source, up to 500 events for each kit. Stacks can be combined with alternates to create different chords (for example) on consecutive strokes.

The DXT900 contains its own sampling engine if you add

the optional internal memory. However, if you want full control of editing, you'll be better off by creating and adjusting your sample offline and then loading it into the 900 by USB. **D**

VERDICT

Honestly, and maybe you think that I'm sugar coating this, but Yamaha's new kit is about as good as it gets. Putting the DTX950K head-to-head with any of the competition's flagship machines would be a pretty good fight, and it would certainly end with a decision rather than a knockout.

It's going to come down to these questions: Do you like the feel of these pads? Do the pads respond to your style of playing? Do you like the sounds included in the brain? Does the kit offer the flexibility and expandability that you'll need for your work now and in your future? Only you can make the final decision.