

GEAR REVIEW

SONOR VINTAGE SERIES DRUM KIT

From £438 Sonor joins the vintage reprisal trend with this stunningly elegant kit which is sure to grab a whole new generation of admirers

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS



As the drum world forges ahead with new innovations there is a definite parallel movement towards resurrecting some of the better aspects of vintage styles. Gretsch and Ludwig have done it and now it is Sonor's turn. Sonor was founded in 1875, which makes 2015 its 140th anniversary, older than Gretsch and Ludwig (both, by the way, started by German émigrés to the USA). In the UK of the 1960s, Trixon was more visible, but Sonor was already quietly making top quality 'teardrop' lug kits. So elongated were these lugs that they had to be offset on the shallower snares and toms, creating a chic image which Sonor has recreated in its new Vintage Series.

Build

The aim is to recapture the vibe of that period from the 1950s when Sonor modernised, up till the mid-1970s when the

In terms of finish, there are just three options – the Vintage Pearl wrap of the review kit and two semi-gloss stains in Vintage Onyx and Vintage Natural. You may prefer the stains (which are slightly cheaper) to the yellowish aged pearl. Sonor had many cool finishes in the 1960-'70s – it would be great to see a few more of those in the future. How about it, Sonor?

Sonor has resurrected its stylish 1950s script logo badge, as used between 1952 and 1961. Underneath though is placed a small banner declaring 'Sonor Vintage Series'. This seems unnecessary and rather detracts from the great look of the script badge.

Also revamped are the 2.3mm triple-flanged steel hoops. These are stamped with 'SONOR Vintage Superprofil' and the top lip is bent over and in rather than out – another nod towards the 1950s. They are particularly weighty and together with the long lugs and dense beech shells make the drums heavier

THE SOUND IS COMMANDINGLY STRONG, CLEAN AND QUITE HARD. VERY '60S, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE 14" DEPTH AND ROUNDED EDGES

more familiar, heavy-duty Sonor kicked in. The '50s was a time of massive change in the drum world and Sonor, as with UK and US drums, was evolving fast. Crucial features were the beech shells and the imaginative hardware and fittings.

Let's start with those shells. Hand-selected premium German beech wood is layered in nine plies, 6mm thick, constructed using Sonor's cross-laminated tension free (CLTF) system. Instead of today's 45° bearing edges the Vintage series returns to the increasingly popular rounded bearing edges, the summit of which is lovely and smooth. Inside the shells display the warm reddish tint of the beech and Sonor trademark vertical inner ply.

Sonor is marketing two set-ups, the Three20 and the Three22. You can buy drums separately though, with a choice of 12 vintage sizes. The extended review set-up is 22"x14", 13"x8", 14"x12", 16"x14" with 14"x5¾" snare.

than average. Other things have undergone inevitable updates. Old Sonor drums, like other European drums, had screwdriver-friendly slot-headed tension screws. The Vintage series has bowed to modern technology and has drum key-tightened TuneSafe tension bolts with fine-pitch threads.

Bass drums are undrilled, but have classic chunky cast 'T' rods for tensioning, and fold-out curvaceous spurs, all adding to the smart and refined look. Small toms have a simple small bracket for a hexagonal mounting rod. It's unobtrusive and much firmer than the brackets of the 1950/'60s.

There are two matching wood-shelled snare drums – a 14"x6½" and a slightly unusually proportioned 14"x5¾". The other interesting feature is the new snare throw-off. The 'Super 50' is a rare design, based on a 1950s Sonor, and as you expect from Sonor it's a prettily made bit of kit. The



Watch our Sonor Vintage kit video demo at <http://bit.ly/SonorVintage>

SINGLE WRAP FINISH

Vintage Pearl as seen here is one of three finishes available at present. The others are Stain Semi-Gloss in Vintage Onyx and Vintage Natural

SNARE DRUM

Available in two sizes, the matching snare drums have a newly designed Super-50 throw-off which is streamlined so that the mechanism is hidden inside the shell

TEARDROP LUGS

Elongated lugs were first seen on Sonor's stylish 1950s drums and have been updated with Tune Safe threads

Essential spec



PRICES

Vintage covered finishes: Three20 shell set: 20"x14" bass, 12"x8" mounted tom, 14"x12" floor tom, £2,178; Three22 shell set: 22"x14" bass, 13"x8" mounted tom, 16"x14" floor tom, £2,222; Snares: 14"x5 3/4" and 14"x6 1/2", £597; Individual shells: 13"x8", £484; 14"x12", £645; 16"x14", £657; 22"x14", £1,081

SHELL MATERIAL

Hand-selected premium German beech wood

CONSTRUCTION

Cross laminated tension free (CLTF) plies

PLIES

9-ply/6mm

BEARING EDGES

Vintage rounded bearing edges, accurately level

FINISHES AVAILABLE

Stain Semi-Gloss; Vintage Onyx, Vintage Natural; Wrapped finish: Vintage Pearl (as pictured)

HOOPS

Snare and toms: Superprofil 2.3 mm steel hoops; bass drums: wrap inlay on wrapped bass drums (as pictured)

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Two preconfigured shell sets - Three20 shell set: 20"x14" bass, 12"x8" tom, 14"x12" floor tom; Three22 shell set: 22"x14" bass, 13"x8" tom, 16"x14" floor tom; Snares: 14"x5 3/4", 14"x6 1/2"; Individual shells - toms: 10"x8", 12"x8", 13"x8"; floor toms: 14"x12", 16"x14", 18"x16"; bass drums: 18"x14", 20"x14", 22"x14", 24"x14"

LUGS

Chrome Teardrop lugs with TuneSafe screws

CONTACT

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GEAR REVIEW

They say...

Thomas Barth *Sonor International Artist Relations and Marketing Manager*



What is the series concept?

"Offering drummers vintage looking and sounding drums that are built under modern manufacturing standards. We wanted to make it as authentic as possible by looking into the company's history which reaches back to 1875. There are lots of things we learned from it, and were able to implement into the Vintage series."

Why now?

"It was our 140th anniversary in 2015 and when we talked about product development it was pretty obvious that this was a striking idea, perfect for our anniversary and beyond. It's also a good tool to educate people about Sonor's history. Lots of drummers don't know that Sonor is the oldest, still-existing drum company. The feedback from our artist family was extremely positive. Endorsers from different genres called as soon as the news was out. And they all love it!"

The 14"x5 3/4" snare drum size is unusual...

"We've been going through old catalogues to see what was available back then. There's a new wrap coming at NAMM 2016, but we're not done yet. There are some options thinking about finishes, hardware and especially snare drum sizes."

strainer lever is reminiscent of vintage 'baseball bat' style muffler levers, and unusually the minimal mechanism is secreted within the shell. There's a firm and secure feel to the lever, while the small tension knob for the Sonor 24-strand German-made stainless steel wires is positioned at the butt end.

Hands On

Those rounded bearing edges undoubtedly soften the attack and darken the sound,

THE 13"X8" TOM IS A VINTAGE SONOR SIZE, ONE INCH SHALLOWER THAN THE USUAL 13"X9", WITH A LITTLE MORE CLOUT AND SPEED AS A RESULT

increasing the beechy woody timbre, while shortening the decay a fraction. This tightening effect is added to by the heavy rims which seem to enclose and compact the sound a little more with a hint of the effect that Gretsch's heavy die-cast rims have.

Sonor generally ships with Remo heads, but the review kit came with Evans Coated 360s on the toms and snare. Either way, white coated single-ply heads, top and bottom, add to the vintage sound and look. With the 360s, and considering all the above sonic components together, the toms have a tone which is more on the calf side than the sharp attacking sound of 45° edges.

The 13"x8" tom is a vintage Sonor size, one inch shallower than the usual 13"x9", and with a little more clout and speed as a result. I found it refreshing after the ubiquitous 13"x9" which can be over-boomy. Likewise, the 14"x12" and 16"x14" floor toms benefit from being shallower (ie: not the more traditional 1960s square sizes), which does make them that bit more compressed and distinct - less lumbering.

The bass drum came with a Fibreskyn

front head and Evans 360 Coated batter. With no port hole, and tuned quite firmly, the sound was commandingly strong, clean and quite hard. Very '60s, especially given the 14" depth and rounded edges. Traditionally tuned with the batter wrinkles just out, there was plenty of beef.

With such a woody set it makes sense to have a matching wood snare. Tonally it accords better than a more clattery metal. Again the Superprofil hoops and rounded edges tighten the centre beat - there's a feeling of being compacted and focused. But catch the comfortable-feeling rims and they certainly ring out abundantly.

Beech is an underused wood and yet one

MOUNTING HARDWARE

Floor tom legs, small tom bracket and bass drum spurs are all updated classic designs, unobtrusive, but strong enough for today's players



CLASSIC BUILD

The Vintage Series has 9-ply 6mm straight-sided German beech shells with rounded-over bearing edges and vertical inner plies

Also try...



1 GRETSCH BROADCASTER

We say: "Gretsch relives its history with this faithful reproduction of its most sought-after Broadcaster round-badge three-ply drums."



2 PEARL WOOD FIBERGLASS KIT

We say: "This excellent, timely update with Kapur shells comes at a knock-down price. Stunningly clear and punchy, grab one while you can."

which is always greeted with enthusiasm when it crops up. It's been described as having the clarity of birch with some of the warmth and resonance of maple. That's a decent enough description. Now I wouldn't normally suggest this, but there is a video of Steve Smith testing the Vintage kit (with 20" bass and 12" tom), and to my ears the drums sound close to perfection. There's probably no need to say more! Search out 'Sonor Vintage Series: Steve Smith Performance' on YouTube.

In fact, Sonor has done us a service here because it's followed by another video of Smith playing his more familiar modern Sonor fusion kit with CS heads and the difference is blisteringly clear. The latter might work better for much of Steve's electro-fusion stuff, but the Vintage is warmer and more rounded, bluffer and tubbier - great for any classic jazz or rock with its authentically evocative '50s/'60s tone. **R**

VERDICT: With its beech shells, rounded bearing edges, Superprofil hoops and teardrop lugs, Sonor's Vintage Series recalls a fondly-remembered defining period in the German company's 140-year evolution.

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
PLAYABILITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
RHYTHM RATING ★★★★★