

SOUNDLAB

Roland HD-1 V-Drums Lite

By Norman Weinberg

As with acoustic drums, the electronic drum market has a number of products that take aim at specific target audiences. A full-featured, tricked-out kit – acoustic or electric – with a \$5,000-plus price tag just isn't intended for the teen-aged, beginning drummer. This is why several companies have recently released new "entry-level" electronic kits with fewer bells and whistles, easier-to-use interfaces, and limited sound sets. The Roland HD-1 is one of these kits.

Roland's new kit may have raised the bar for the player just starting out, or for the more experienced drummer who wants to keep a simple practice kit in his bedroom or office. The HD-1 is a basic 5-piece kit with crash, ride, and hi-hat pads. It includes both the bass drum pedal and hi-hat pedal, with everything mounted on a custom, lightweight frame that doesn't take up much floor space. In fact, if you can't find a place to put this kit, it might be time to move out of that closet you're living in.

The Pads

For starters, the HD-1 includes an 8" mesh-headed snare drum pad

and three newly designed rubber-headed tom pads at about 7.5" in diameter. All three of the cymbals are Roland's CY-5 pads, which have been around for a while. Oh yeah, all of these pads are strictly monophonic. The bass drum and hi-hat pedals are built right into the frame, which Roland says helps to keep the kit quiet. Along with the hi-hat pad, you can perform fully closed, half-open, and fully open sounds, as well as a foot splash.

It was a good decision for Roland to include a mesh-style pad for the snare drum. The mesh responds well to all dynamic levels, letting you play everything from sensitive ghost notes to full-tilt backbeats. Much to my surprise, the tom pads felt pretty good too, but of course they weren't as sensitive as the snare.

The foot pedals felt okay, but they didn't blow me away. It also took me a bit to get used to the "throw" of the hi-hat pedal, but once I did, it operated as I expected. To keep things simple, there are no pedal adjustments of any kind. Overall I'd say Roland's aim was true on the extraneous noise front, as the kit is definitely a bit quieter than other electronic kits.

GREAT TASTE, LESS FILLING

The Brain

The HD-1 brain is about the size of a paperback book, making it one of the smallest on the market, and it's designed to mount right in the middle of the frame. The left edge of the brain contains all of the inputs and outputs. There's a MIDI-out jack, a minijack mix input, a minijack audio output, and a minijack headphone output. The right edge of the unit, which contains only the DC input and the power on/off switch, is dedicated to power control.

The face of the brain is pretty simple: Two small knobs control the tempo and the volume (main output and headphones use the same knob), and then there are seven buttons. The buttons numbered 1-5 are used to call up the different kits. Two other dedicated buttons call up the drum kit variations, as well as turn the metronome on and off. Talk about simple.

According to the manual provided with the kit, the metronome's speed ranges between 40-220 bpm. Since there's no display on the HD-1 brain, you won't be able to specify any exact tempo. As an added bonus, the metronome is capable of playing one of three different sounds: click, cowbell, or maraca, at one of three different volume levels: soft, medium, or loud.

The MIDI settings on the HD-1 are also extremely simple. There's a good chance that buyers of the HD-1 won't have much use for the MIDI-out connection provided. Each of the instruments transmits on channel 10 as a fixed setting.

Also fixed are the MIDI note numbers that each surface will send. For example, if you want your bass drum to fire a particular sound, you'll need to program your module to have that sound sitting under note number 36. There are separate MIDI note numbers for the open and closed hi-hats (46 and 42), as well as the foot *chick* sound (44). Position data from the hi-hat pedal is transmitted as control change number 4. While these MIDI controls are extremely basic, they should suit the needs of a beginning player just fine.

The HD-1 has ten drum kits stored in its memory. These are labeled Acoustic, Jazz, Power, Double Bass, Drums & Percussion, World, Electronic, Dance, Voices, and Droid. Some of the kits have velocity switches hiding under the hood. For

DETAILS

MODEL HD-1 V-Drums Lite Electronic Drum Set

PRICE \$999

PADS One 8" mesh-head pad, three 7.5" rubber pads, three CY-5 cymbal pads.

KITS 10

DEMO SONGS 10

INPUTS Custom multi-input trigger jack (DB-25), mix-in

OUTPUTS MIDI, audio, headphones

FEATURES Support stand with integrated kick pedal, hi-hat pedal, and cables; instructional DVD included.

ADD-ONS

PM-01 Personal Drum Monitor

PRICE \$149

ACCESSORIES (NOT REVIEWED)

DAP-1 V-Drums Accessory Package

(headphones, drum throne, sticks, stereo mini connection cable).

PRICE \$109

TDM-1 V-Drums Mat

PRICE \$109-\$119

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example, the Acoustic kit's ride cymbal changes from the bow to a bell sound once your dynamic reaches a high enough level. The Voices kit has three sounds assigned to each tom pad, allowing the player to experience some melodic drumming. Even though the snare drum is monophonic, stronger dynamics fire off a rimshot sample. More often than not, playing a rimshot results in a strong enough dynamic to get the desired sound. The velocity shifts help to make the drumming experience more lifelike and less monotonous.

As you might expect, these kits are in ROM and can't be edited, adjusted, or modified in any way. To be fair, the kits that Roland selected for the HD-1 sound surprisingly good. For my tastes, the Power kit was pretty useless as it was totally awash in reverb (I no longer have fantasies of playing in

a domed stadium with my heavy metal group). After a short time I became bored with the special effects kits and kept returning to the Acoustic and Jazz kits.

With the HD-1, you won't be able to individually adjust the pads to better fit your playing style, but you can make global sensitivity changes. By holding down the "variation" button until it blinks, you can select one of five different sensitivity selections. There are no controls for dealing with crosstalk, double triggering, or false triggering. If you're having problems with any of these triggering issues, you'll have to find another way to solve them. That being said, for most players, the machine is going to work great straight out of the box. In order to get the HD-1 to exhibit any crosstalk problems, I had to play much harder than I ever would at a gig.

As a bonus feature, the HD-1 contains one demo pattern for each kit that the brain will play all by itself. For the player just starting up, hearing these patterns might be helpful. Unfortunately, you won't be able to play along with them, as all the pads become inactive once the pattern begins to play. More useful is the mix-in jack so that you can play along with your favorite tunes.

The Rack

The hippest feature of the HD-1 is also the one that's most likely to cause controversy. As I mentioned earlier, the stand that supports the entire HD-1 is small, light, and easy to fold up for storage or moving. This same design that makes the HD-1 so space efficient also makes it difficult to customize the arrangement of instruments. There are hard limits to how far apart some instruments can be, how high they can be mounted, and at what angles they can be placed. Without a doubt, some players will find that the stand just isn't adjustable enough to place the surfaces exactly where they want them. The biggest issue may be the position of the bass drum and hi-hat pedals, which are absolutely fixed in terms of angle and distance apart from one another. I'm 5'8", and the pedals were a comfortable fit for me, but I certainly see how they could pose a problem for a very young student or a player taller than myself.

The cables for all the pads pass through the interior of the stand's pipes. And, since the instruments have a limited range of position, there's very little excess cabling around the kit. In fact, Roland has taken the next step and wired all of the pads' cables to a single multi-pin trigger connection cable. While this totally solves any problem of hooking the correct pad up to the correct input, it also means that you won't be able to use the HD-1 brain for anything other than the HD-1 pads. As an added touch to the stand, there are three leveling feet that can be used if you need to set the kit on an uneven floor.

Extras

The review kit included the optional PM-01 Personal Drum Monitor. This is a tower-style monophonic speaker system designed specifically for the HD-1. It is also the essence of simplicity. The back of the speaker system includes a single line input mini-jack and the power jack. The front includes a volume knob and a

power on/standby knob. That's all there is to it. If you want to turn the unit off completely, you first turn the knob to standby and then unplug the device from the wall.

In action, the PM-01 system is designed to sit in between the kick and hi-hat pedals. This puts the system close enough to the instruments to create the illusion that the sounds are actually coming from the drums. The system has a power rating of 15 watts and uses a single 4" speaker. The speaker uses a bass-reflex design, so there may be more low-frequency response than you might expect from such a small speaker. Keep in mind that this is only a "personal monitor." It will push enough drive for your bedroom, but it's not going to fill a concert hall.

If you're thinking of buying the HD-1 for use as a practice kit, you'll likely be using headphones for late-night practice. But once ear fatigue kicks in, it's a pleasant change to lose the cans and go au naturel.

Two other add-on packages are available for the HD-1. One is the TDM-1 mat. If you set your kit on this mat, you'll protect your floor from any scuffs and scrapes. Plus, Roland claims the mat helps to quiet the kit even more. The other add-on is the DAP-1 accessory package. It includes a drum throne, sticks, earphones, and a minijack cable.

Lastly, there's the video manual, which is really cool. None other than Johnny Rabb takes the viewer through setting up the kit and working with various features. Rabb's presentation is clear, light-hearted, and fun. I hope that this becomes a standard feature for all future electronic percussion products. Watching a pro work through the machine is a lot more fun than reading a manual.

VERDICT

If you're a beginning player who doesn't have the space for a full kit, or needs to keep the volume level low for practice, then the HD-1 is a great choice. It's got everything you need to progress from beginner to intermediate player. I think that Roland may also sell a bunch of kits to weekend warriors who want to keep a kit in the corner of the office. (Forget lunch hour - grab a power bar and drum for the next 50 minutes.) This might also be the perfect kit for the private teacher who wants to add a secondary kit to the studio. All in all, the HD-1 is a unique and welcome addition to the electronic drum market.