

NEW GEAR

EXCLUSIVE

KIT EDITING FEATURES

about. 18" hats for your Big Rock kit? Yours at the touch of a button

THE BRAIN BOASTS

522 sounds, 49 preset kits and the new Scope function, aimed at improving your accuracy and timekeeping

THE MESH SNARE

and tailorable sensitivity settings make for 'real'-feeling playability

The most significant aspect of the new kit is the TD-9 module itself, with its spanking new selection of sounds and friendly interface



THE CYMBAL ARMS'

ball-and-clamp design allows for huge flexibility in positioning terms

ROLAND TD-9K



£1057 It's Roland's eagerly awaited new arrival, but does it live up to expectations? Jordan McLachlan takes stock

However good (or otherwise) the new Roland TD-9K proves to be, this is An Important Kit. As the mid-range offering from arguably the strongest name in electronic drum kits, this set-up assumes significance simply because a) if it's any good it'll be the rig to beat, and b) if it isn't, it'll allow others a slice of what's becoming an increasingly large pie. So the new TD-9K has a lot resting on its shoulders - whether it proves up to taking on the mantle of its popular predecessor or not, you'll find out in a few short paragraphs.

Build

It's all very well getting worked up about flagship products like Roland's TD-20K and Yamaha's latest, awesome DTXtreme III, but in the real world it's kits like the TD-9 that more regularly find employment with players like you and I. Designed to offer a blend of the high-end and the affordable, we've come to expect this middle ground to throw up kits that sound good, with reasonable editability and functions, and a playing feel that's a step-up from the entry-level stuff.

The TD-9K aims to deliver on that latter point by sporting a simple but highly effective rack system with newly-designed cymbal arms and a mesh head snare pad to boot. That the rack hangs together very well and is super-simple to set up should come as no surprise - we've come to expect that of Roland. But touches like the new cymbal arms are a welcome addition.

A ball-and-clamp design allows for huge flexibility in positioning terms, and in a situation where the other elements of the kit are rather more 'fixed' than in the case of an acoustic set, anything that adds such options is valued.

The mesh snare will also go down well in the marketplace. I'm currently of the opinion that big rubber pads (of the ilk used by Yamaha for the DTXtreme III) can feel as good as anything; but when we're dealing with smaller pads - particularly where the snare is concerned - I'll still take a mesh head.

Of course the most significant aspect of the new kit is the TD-9 module itself, with its spanking new selection of sounds and friendly interface. The brain is filled with 520-odd sounds, 49 preset kits of various types and 50 songs with which to keep yourself from getting bored listening to the metronome. We'll come to discuss how the sounds impress shortly, but while we're here there are a couple of TD-9 features that also warrant a mention.

The first is the new Scope function, aimed at improving your accuracy and timekeeping, or at the very least drive you insane with frustration. Basically a live graphical representation of how close your strokes are to a metronomic click, Scope places dots on an on-screen grid as you play. It's a harsh illustration of how spot-on, or not, you are, and a useful practice tool. The screen display can be zoomed in as well, which makes Scope very easy to use when playing, no matter how animated you get. The mid-range nature of the TD-9K means that we have to ➤

From the Horse's Mouth!

Craig Blundell, the official TD-9K demonstrator, gives us the lowdown on Roland's new baby

What can you tell us about the development of the new TD-9K?

"It's all brand new in terms of the module. The chip that features in the TD-9 isn't shared by any other Roland module. And it represents a really big step forward in terms of sounds and usability. Michael Schack (Roland electronic drum artist and demonstrator) was involved in its development and the results show how closely the company has listened to artists."

What, to you, are the TD-9K's most impressive aspects?

"The first would be simply how good the preset kits are. They're completely usable without resorting to EQ or tuning. And the sense of character built into each one is amazing, thanks to the way that bass drum sounds and toms, for example, are so well matched. There's a real difference between kit styles that means they respond differently to each other and feel right for



Craig Blundell

the type of music they've been designed for."

Is it truly giggable?

"Absolutely. I've used it for gigs, straight into the PA. With the right monitoring, there's no reason you can't use it on stage."

ROLAND TD-9K



A SUPER-NEAT FEATURE
of the TD-9K is its use of a SCART-style plug at the brain end of the wiring loom



THE FD-8 DOESN'T FEEL
like a real hi-hat pedal, but don't underestimate the way it works – it's no slouch



THE COMPACT PD-85 TOM PADS
feel nice, and their smallish diameter helps with accuracy, even if you might like them to be bigger

ESSENTIAL SPEC

Roland

PRICE
Roland TD-9K £1057

SOUNDS
522

KITS
50

PADS
PD105 mesh pad, three PD-85 rubber toms, CY-5 dual trigger cymbal, CY-8 dual trigger cymbal, KD-8 kick

FEATURES
Scope rhythm training, Quick Record

CONNECTIONS
Two spare trigger inputs, MIDI in/out, Mix in, L/R stereo outs, headphone out, USB stick input

PLAY-ALONG TRACKS
50

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forego a couple of nice features that you'll find on other, pricier offerings. Chief amongst these is the hi-hat set-up, which comprises the FD-8 trigger pedal twinned with a little CY-5 pad. It actually works well, but the less-substantial-than-the-real-thing feel of the FD-8 obviously can't replicate the response of a proper hi-hat stand. The good news is, however, that the TD-9 is compatible with Roland's VH-11 hi-hat, as used for the TD-12, so upgrading is easy when you feel the need.

Hands On

Any restrictions that the price-point of the TD-9K has placed on the designers are largely forgotten when it comes to playing the kit, though. The module is a sexy piece of gear, and contains a host of typically strong sonic offerings. As ever, some preset kits are more impressive than others, with particular favourites including the warm but poky Jazz Funk set and the 'standard' V-Tour Studio. The electro kits are, as ever with Roland, very convincing too – the 808 and 909 should be, of course, but others, like the minimal house collection, are fun and very funky. There's a very useful amount of editing available on each kit, too. And although there's a degree of button-pushing involved in getting to the required editing page occasionally, the TD-9 is fairly self-explanatory, so the odd glance at the manual should get you through. It's a

simple affair, for example, to decide you'd like a bigger pair of hats on the Big Rock kit and go for 15"s, or 18"s even, just by dialling the data wheel. The same goes for bigger or smaller drums, and different shell materials – in short there's huge scope for either tweaking existing kits or coming up with your own.

EQ and effects are also a breeze to modify (and there is a fair amount of cavernous reverb on some of the standard kits – to impress 'in-store' presumably), and while the TD-9 doesn't

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boast a dedicated 'kit mixer' on the front of the unit as per posher brains, the on-screen mixer is only a couple of presses away. Not quite as quick to make on-stage changes, but painless enough.

As far as response is concerned, the TD-9K certainly does enough to make it a thoroughly rewarding experience for those after an acoustic emulation to practise with. The combination of some very nice kit sounds, the feel of the mesh snare and tailor-able sensitivity settings get it close enough to feeling 'real' as to

be eminently playable. Given its price, it's brilliant.

But it's the 'package' nature of electronic kits that makes them so appealing. An acoustic kit can't help train your left hand to be more accurate, or provide entertaining backing tracks to help practice sessions fly by. On this front, the TD-9 fares well too. As always, metal-heads will despise the clunky synth guitars of the heavier tunes, but for those keen to work on their funk, soul, disco and pop chops, there's lots of amusement on board.

And another ace up the TD-9's sleeve is its option for you to plug in a USB stick and play back MP3 files, so you don't have to hook up an iPod or suchlike (although this is an option too). Just raid your PC for your favourite, legally downloaded tunes, whack them on a stick and you're away.

Verdict

It's hard to see what Roland could have done to make the TD-9K any better without significantly increasing costs here. Sure, a VH-11, bigger pads with mesh heads and the like would be lovely, but that's what upgrades (or indeed the TD-9KX) are for. As the new breed of affordable-but-serious electronic percussion goes, the TD-9K makes a bold statement. So for those not raking in a quarter mil a year in the city, or those working in home studios rather than Abbey Road, this little rig is probably more than enough for smiles for miles. **R**

Rating ★★★★★



TRY IT WITH...



ROLAND VH-11 HI-HAT
as the added 'realness' will extend the fun you get from the TD-9 no end



USB MEMORY STICK
since MP3s on a stick are the simplest way to add playalong-ability to an electronic kit



ROLAND PM-10 AMP
– the 30w combo also allows you to connect CD/MP3 player and beats while using headphones