

GEAR REVIEW

ALESIS COMMAND MESH KIT



£699 An all-mesh kit for under £700 from the strongest 'other' name in electronic drums

WORDS: **STUART WILLIAMS**

The electronic drum set market used to be pretty much a two-horse race, with Japanese giants Yamaha and Roland both the first names that sprang to the minds of many potential e-kit customers. However, in the last decade or so, this part of the drum market has become a battleground - particularly in the entry and mid-price range, with plenty of generic options available at competitive prices. One company that has stuck out as a serious contender is Alesis, offering more than just 'me too' products, it has fast become the third name on the 'e-drums you can trust' list. And for good reason too, its pedigree has provided us with affordable electronic music gear ranging from the 3630 compressor to the SR16 drum machine, so it should be no surprise that the company has harnessed this ability when approaching electronic drums too. This year sees the existing Command kit refined to include mesh pads to offer a greater playing experience. Let's take a look.

Build

The Command Mesh sits between two other kits in the Alesis line-up to feature all-mesh pads: the Forge, and Alesis' premium offering, the Strike. It follows a standard five-piece-plus-cymbals kit configuration, with three 8" tom pads, a 10" snare pad and an 8" bass drum pad, which also uses a mesh head. The

snare and tom pads are all dual-zone, meaning that separate sounds can be assigned to the head and rim of each pad, offering up to eight different voices from these pads alone. There are three 10" cymbal pads (ride, crash and hi-hats) plus a hi-hat controller pedal. Included in the box is a sturdy 1 1/2" tube rack system, similar to that found on kits from Roland and Yamaha - and a bass drum pedal. Other features include a USB MIDI connection, to enable you to easily record MIDI data into a computer - plus standard MIDI in/out sockets, 3.5mm headphone and auxiliary input jacks, expansion pad inputs for an additional tom and cymbal pad. To the side of the module sits another USB socket, allowing you to connect a memory stick containing jam tracks or samples.

Hands On

As with other brands, Alesis supply the rack for the kit in a 'flat pack' style, so the first job is to build it. This is tedious, of course, but fairly unavoidable, and made easier by the included photographic guide. The Command module is a sleek-looking piece of kit, and certainly sets itself apart from more off-the-shelf modules. Central to controlling everything is the large rotary control in the middle, and as is common, navigating through preset kits is easy, while delving deeper to edit sounds will require a bit more weaving through menus using the



USB SLOT

You can load songs, kits and samples into the Command module via a USB stick, which enhances the base-level offering significantly

"THE COMMAND MESH IS A REASONABLY-PRICED KIT THAT PROVIDES A DECENT LEVEL OF FUNCTIONALITY AND FEATURES OUT OF THE BOX"



SINGLE-ZONE CYMBALS

The cymbal pads are all 10", and each one is single-zone. However, the crash and ride pads are choke-able

MESH PADS

Look to the bigger guns for an all-mesh head kit, and you'll need to budget considerably more than this

Essential spec



PRICES

£699

TYPE

Electronic kit

PRESETS

70 (50 preset + 20 user)

SOUNDS

629 voices, up to 99 user samples

SOCKETS

Trigger cable loom, additional trigger inputs (1x stereo, 1x mono) 1/4" L/R main outputs, 3.5 mm headphone out, 3.5 mm auxiliary input MIDI in, MIDI out, USB MIDI, USB memory stick

EXTRAS

Rack, sticks, bass drum pedal, hi-hat pedal included

CONTACT

InMusic Europe
01252 896040
www.alesis.com

GEAR REVIEW

They say...

Ross Davies

Alesis' International Channel Marketing Manager gives us the skinny on the Command, and what's coming next...



What was the catalyst for offering the Command as a mesh configuration?

"We knew drummers were looking for a kit that felt good, sounded great, had all the right features, and was quiet for their practising and recording needs. So, we decided to upgrade the Command Kit to an all Mesh Kit and introduce it into the market at this amazing price point!"

The module offers the ability to load in wav files to be played from the pads...

"Yes, this is one of the great features of the Command Module. Drummers can load in any sound or loop via a USB flash drive and assign it to any pad. This feature enables the drummer to totally customize their kit to sound different from any other drummer, even at the entry-level price point."

Can current Command owners upgrade their pads to mesh?

"We are rolling out an Alesis accessory program this year so drummers will be able to add different sized mesh heads to any of their Alesis drum kits."

Alesis has developed a name for offering great value for money, is this always an important consideration?

"Value is always great for the customers and we consider many things when we develop a new product. Alesis electronic drums and percussion is always evolving and we are building a world-wide team of drummers that are working together to not only create exceptional value products but also pro electronic drum solutions. Stay tuned - there's a lot more coming!"

cursor buttons. Each voice in the kit is selected by hitting the relevant playing surface, and then adjusting parameters such as volume, decay time, pitch, reverb etc. We've encountered better-looking displays, with slicker interfaces and simpler

"THE EXPECTED ELECTRO STANDARDS ARE PRESENT: SNAPPY SNARES, HAND CLAPS, 808 KICKS AND SIMMONS-STYLE TOMS TOO"



COMMAND MODULE

Alesis has employed a slick-looking design for the Command module, keeping the layout clean and simple



CYMBAL DESIGN

The cymbal pads are single-zone designs, however you can choke the sound after striking a note

navigation, but it's really not difficult once you get used to tapping through the options. The sounds within the module follow the overall feel of the rest of the kit: it's safe, with everything you need. Acoustic kits range from studio all-rounders to samples of brushed jazz kits, taking in rock, funk and 'power' style sounds along the way. Meanwhile, the expected electro standards are present too: snappy snares, hand claps, 808 kicks and Simmons-style toms are there too. It's loaded with percussion, and there's a

Also try...



1 ROLAND TD-1 KPX2

We say: "Roland's most affordable all-mesh kit offers a similar configuration, with rubber bass drum triggers rather than a bass drum pad, but can take a double pedal."

surprising amount of tuned percussion - made more playable by the number of playing surfaces included with the dual-zone pads. With some tweaking it's possible to tease pretty much every kind of sound you need out of the raw samples, making it very well suited to playing different styles.

This can be done by connecting your phone (or any device for that matter) to the 3.5mm aux input, or by plugging in a USB memory stick. As we mentioned above, the USB feature also allows you to import your own samples and assign them to a pad, which unlocks a world of creative possibilities. There are a few caveats, though. The manual states that this function will work with a USB stick ranging from 4-64GB (although our randomly selected 2GB drive worked just fine), and it must be formatted to DOS Fat 32 (easily done on your computer). As well as this, the

HARDWARE

As well as the sturdy three-sided chrome rack, the kit comes with bass drum and hi-hat pedals

PAD EXPANSION

As well as the included configuration, you can add an additional tom and cymbal pad to the setup

MESH BASS DRUM

The bass drum pad is 8", and uses the same mesh heads as the rest of the kit. It's tunable, so you can adjust the tension and feel

samples have to be wav format, and must also be mono, so there could be some possible editing required in order to get your sounds to work. Assuming the above, placing the USB stick into the module creates a set of folders, and as long as the sounds you want to trigger are placed in the 'Samples' folder, they will be visible on the module's screen when viewing the USB menu. You select the file, import it into the module, then scroll to the start of the sound list and assign it to the pad of your choice. While all this sounds a bit fiddly, once you have the correct format, it's a lot of fun, and could make the Command a useful hybrid brain for live as well as home use.

The Command Mesh isn't without its limitations - it's a reasonably-priced kit that provides a decent level of functionality and features out of the box. The hi-hat control feels springier and has a boxier look and feel

Also try...



2 YAMAHA DTX582K

We say: "The DTX582K from Yamaha features DTX pads, plus three-zone cymbal pads, a KP100 kick drum trigger and stand-mounted hi-hats"

to our Roland model, but the travel is adjustable and we had no problem getting it to open and close at a natural-feeling distance. The inclusion of a 'proper' bass drum pad, as well as a sturdy pedal, rather than a space/noise-saving trigger is a positive for first-time e-kit buyers, or those looking to move between acoustic and electronic kits too. We did find that the mounting hardware was prone to moving a little under heavier strikes unless tightened very securely, and the rubber rim shrouds made tuning with the included key a bit fiddly. With all that said, these are minor grumbles, rather than anything that is likely to stop you enjoying the kit. A quick scan of your favourite online retailer's website will reveal that while there's no shortage of electronic kits on the market, there aren't many boasting this level of features, complete with mesh heads. Yes,

dual-zone cymbal pads would be a 'nice-to-have', particularly for developing ride voicings, but this kit is built to hit a price point, and at no point did we feel like we were playing a lower-priced compromise. The end result is a solid, if not massively surprising set of sounds as a competitive package. **R**

VERDICT: Alesis has done a fine job with the Command Mesh. The pads alone make it a worthy contender, while the range of sounds on offer followed by the sample playback option make this a kit that will take a long time to outgrow.

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