

GEAR REVIEW

SONOR AQ1 STAGE KIT

£1,068 Sonor expands its Chinese made entry-range options with the all-birch AQ1, a setup that includes hardware

WORDS: TOM BRADLEY

Since Sonor was originally founded as a small workshop creating marching drums and drum heads in 1875, the German company has expanded considerably to become one of the most recognised brands in the drum world, turning heads in particular with its custom order-only SQ2 flagship range. In a bid to further infiltrate the entry-level and intermediate markets Sonor has recently released the all-maple AQ2 and the brand new birch AQ1.

Build

Unlike the AQ2, which comes in a range of five configurations (Stage, Studio, Bop, Safari and Martini), the AQ1 is available in just two options. The Stage set (as reviewed) has a 22"x17½" bass drum, 10"x7" and 12"x8" rack toms, 16"x15" floor tom and 14"x6" snare. The Studio set shares the same rack tom and snare drum dimensions, the kick drum is a smaller 20"x16" and the floor tom 14"x13". Both configurations are constructed from 100 percent birch and are available in a choice of two classic finishes – Piano Black and Piano White (as pictured). The high-gloss lacquer of our review kit is certainly pleasing to the eye and despite its no-frills nature, is finished to a high standard. The Chinese-made shells are of a good standard and are completed with chunky curved Sonor lugs (16 for the kick and floor tom; 12 for the rack toms; 10 dual lugs for the snare) and triple-flanged hoops – both finished in chrome. The rack toms use Sonor's discreetly elegant SmartMount system, which attaches around just two lugs via a thin metal plate that's sandwiched between two oversized rubber grommets. This makes for a low-profile mounting solution which, while making no actual shell contact, doesn't move or wobble like some. The kit is finished with a ball-joint double tom holder for use with the drilled bass drum.

Also included in the price of the AQ1 is a full Sonor 2000 Series hardware set that consists of a hi-hat stand, snare drum stand, two mini-boom cymbal stands and the brand



Also try...

1 YAMAHA STAGE CUSTOM BIRCH

We say: "It's beautifully made; solidly engineered to take the knocks of real life and produces a quality of sound that defies its price tag."

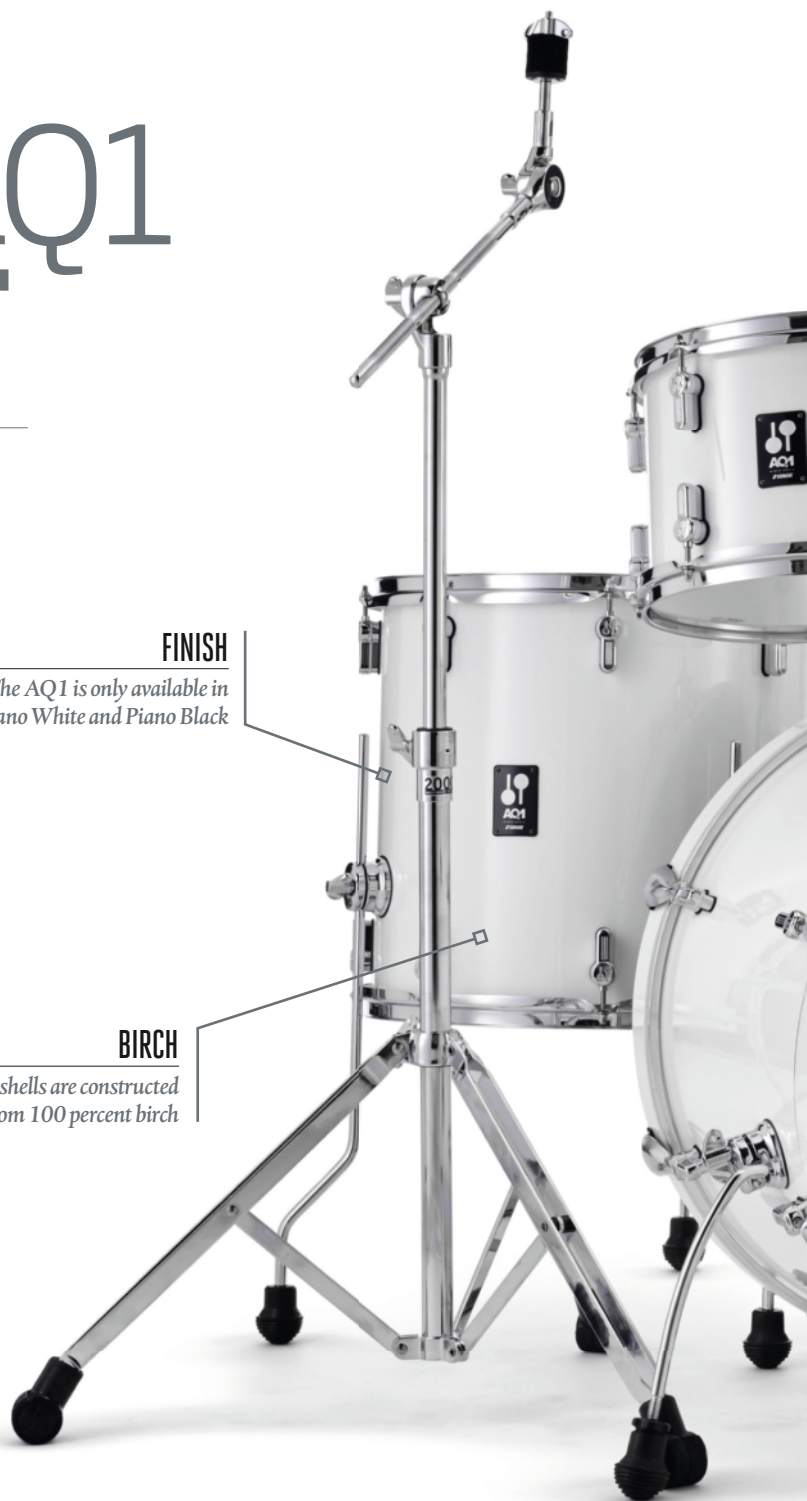


2 TAMA SUPERSTAR CLASSIC MAPLE

We say: "The Superstar Classic represents decent value for money, offering punchy tones. The included snare particularly punches above its weight."

FINISH
The AQ1 is only available in Piano White and Piano Black

BIRCH
AQ1 shells are constructed from 100 percent birch



new 2000 model single bass drum pedal. We've been continually impressed with Sonor hardware over the years and the entry range 2000 series is no exception. A few noteworthy features include gear-less tilters on the snare and cymbal stands, the brushed steel finish of the bass and hi-hat pedals and the remarkable adjustability of the tom arms, which allows for the hexagonal mounting pole to be re-positioned within the plastic ball-joint itself.

Hands On

The AQ1 is ready to go straight out of the box and it satisfyingly requires very little adjustment before we're up and running. The

rack toms are fairly high-pitched and their punchy nature makes them just right for a pop/R'n'B vibe. The thick birch shells offer the expected focus in tone, but combined with a decent amount of resonance. The supplied Chinese UT Pinstripe-style batter heads bring an extra level of attack to the toms, which is actually extremely welcome in the reverb-heavy studio live room we're testing in. The floor tom is tuned relatively much lower than the rack toms and produces a surprisingly shorter note than expected. There is a good and very satisfying dose of low-end but it's much heavier in the initial attack department, rather than delivering the lingering presence that one might have hoped for. It becomes

HARDWARE

The AQ1 comes complete with a full set of Sonor 2000 series hardware

THE PUNCH AND GENEROUS LOW-END OF THESE SHELLS CREATE THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR A SATISFYING BASS DRUM TONE

TOM MOUNTING

The SmartMount is low-profile and only makes contact with two lugs

STUDIO VS STAGE

The Stage set features a 22" bass drum and 16" floor tom while the Studio set uses a 20" kick and 14" floor

Essential spec



PRICE

Studio and Stage sets: £1,068

SHELL MATERIAL

Birch

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Ply

BEARING EDGES

45°

FINISHES AVAILABLE

Piano Black and Piano White

HOOPS

Triple-flanged chrome

SHELL AVAILABILITY

Studio: 20"x16" bass, 14"x13" floor tom, 10"x7" and 12"x8" rack toms, 14"x6" snare; Stage: 22"x17½" bass, 16"x15" floor tom, 10"x7" and 12"x8" rack toms, 14"x6" snare

SUPPLIED HEADS

Remo UT

LUGS PER DRUM

Bass drum: 16 single lugs; Floor tom: 16 single lugs; Rack toms: 12 single lugs; Snare: 10 dual lugs

TOM MOUNT

Sonor SmartMount with DTH 2000 tom holder

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pretty apparent whilst tinkering with the tuning that when I support the hoop with one hand and strike the head with the other, the drum offers considerably more resonance. Resting the drum back on its rubber feet confirms that the length of the note is truncated by the legs.

The un-ported bass drum is wide open and delivers a fairly lengthy grumbling note with each strike. The new 2000 series single pedal is the perfect accompaniment and not only looks excellent (the solid baseplate is a great touch) but it feels pretty good too. Once again, the punch and generous low-end of these shells create the perfect recipe for a satisfying bass drum tone.

We'd love to try the Studio configuration with the 20" bass drum and 14" floor tom.

Finally turning our attention to the snare drum. The 14"x6" shell is the ideal size to give a best-of-both between the popular 5½" and 6½" depths. On paper this size works well but, unfortunately, the drum just doesn't have enough character to really register the difference. The 10 dual lugs give plenty of control over tuning, which comes in handy when trying to get the best out of the drum. At a medium tuning it works well to provide a fairly decent backbone to an otherwise meaty kit. As I go higher with the tuning it develops more of a crack yet still sounds a little on the boxy side. It's a perfectly serviceable snare

— especially considering the level of the kit, but it does suffer from the 'included snare' syndrome we've seen in so many other intermediate-level kits. **R**

VERDICT: Sonor have brought some brilliant features to their entry kit, including the packaged 2000 series hardware pack. The AQ1 brings punchy tones with a healthy dose of low-end and sleek looks.

BUILD QUALITY



PLAYABILITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



RHYTHM RATING

