

# ZEBRA DRUMS

## FREE FLOATING DRUM KIT



**£3,999** Extraordinary kit combines modernistic and vintage aesthetics in an engineering powerhouse of resonance enhancing, fool-proof tuning drum design

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**D**rumazon of South Wales has a policy of bringing to the UK hand-made boutique drums from around the globe. Zebra Drums are made in the Netherlands and we previously favourably reviewed a couple of snare drums in *Rhythm*, March 2018. Now we have a full kit, and it's a pretty radical beast, with finger-locked stave construction and an ingenious, thoughtfully engineered approach to maximising resonance. Drum shells are free-floating and the tension of both batter and bottom heads is simultaneously achieved by simply tensioning the batter. The whole conception and creation are the fruits of Sjoerd van den Beuken's labours at his workshop in Roermond, south east Netherlands.

### Build

Sjoerd makes shells using a variety of timbers (from walnut to maple to oak), but for this kit he has chosen London plane trees. Yes, those mottled camouflage-trunked leviathans that line the avenues of our cities and municipal parks. Of mixed descent, the London plane is part American sycamore with a maple-like leaf. Odd then that it has not been used much in drum making (to my knowledge), Europeans opting mostly for birch or beech. Strange because it is rather special.

The way Sjoerd makes his shells, using quarter sawn lumber, intensifies the plane wood's understated beauty. It enables Sjoerd to meticulously select and assemble stave shells with a vertically grained, stripy look, hence the Zebra allusion. Each vertical stave is roughly one

inch across, so there are numerous staves in each drum.

Butt-joined staves are always in danger of ex/imploding. The likelihood of this with Zebra shells is massively reduced because the staves are 'finger locked': they have serrated edges that engage like geared teeth, which enables shells to be made thinner yet remain stable. Zebra's shells vary in thickness from 6mm small toms (the thinnest and best looking staves I've ever seen) through to 12mm bass drums.

As for bearing edges, toms have a small round-over with a 45 degree



### SPUR OF THE MOMENT

The massive steel mounting name plates isolate the bass spurs while also creating a strong visual identity

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## SPRING LOADED

The Spring Action Suspension (SAS) mounts on all toms, including the floor tom, create a further barrier to resonance curbing

## LONDON CALLING

Zebra's multi-stave construction leads to absolutely flawless shells, in this case utilising London plane wood, with subtly beautiful grain patterns

## SINGLE HEAD TENSION

On toms and bass drum both the top and bottom heads are tensioned equally and simultaneously producing a pure sound

## Essential spec



### PRICES

£3,999  
22"x16" bass drum;  
10"x8" and 12"x8" toms  
with SAS tom mounts;  
14"x11" floor tom with  
SAS floor mounts;  
14"x6" matching snare

### SHELL MATERIAL

London plane tree wood

### CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Interlocking  
finger-jointed solid  
stave segments

### THICKNESS OF STAVES

Varies from 6mm  
(10" tom) to 12mm  
(bass drum)

### BEARING EDGES

Toms and bass: small  
round-over with 45  
degree counter cut;  
Snare drum: double 45  
degrees (also available  
with a big round over)

### FINISHES AVAILABLE

Matte Oil (as pictured);  
alternatives include  
Semi Gloss and coloured  
stains

### HOOPS

2.3mm triple-flanged

### SHELL AVAILABILITY

Toms: 8"x6" to 18"x18";  
Bass drums: 16"x12"  
to 24"x15"

### TOM MOUNTS

SAS (Spring Action  
Suspension) mounting  
system

### SNARE DRUM

Matching snare fitted  
with brass tube lugs and  
Trick throw-off

### CONTACT

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# GEAR REVIEW

## They say...

**Sjoerd van den Beuken**  
*The founder, designer and manufacturer of Zebra Drums in the Netherlands*



### Sjoerd, what is Zebra's mission?

"My objective is to build a kit without compromises. I build my own very thin stave shells, a newly designed free-floating tuning system and unique suspension system. The combination of stave shell and free floating system is unique.

"Many drummers have difficulty tuning their drums. This system solves that - it's really easy. You instantly get a resonant sound out of the toms. I wanted the floor tom to sound like a suspended tom. But most importantly, it helps you tune the drums better than you would have with separate tuning. The tuning is a really important part of the sound of this kit."

### You've certainly created a distinctive look.

"Almost everything of the toms and bass drum is custom built. I design and build the hardware myself. The bass drum alone has 34 custom parts, including the shell itself. The kit just looks different. You can instantly see it's one of my kits. I put the logo inside the bass drum spur plate on both sides of the bass drum, too. I really like that detail."



counter cut, snare drums have a double 45 degree peak (although a round-over is also an option). The snare has deep flattened snare beds.

The review kit shells are finished in Matte Oil, which is actually satin smooth. In the case of the plane shell the result is beguiling, which you really have to see in the flesh. Yes, it's subtle - too subtle for rock'n'roll perhaps - but classy. Thus our kit has the look of upmarket eco-design furniture in a glossy architecture magazine. As I say, not very rock'n'roll. But Sjoerd is aware of this and offers coloured stains and semi-gloss finishes, not to mention darker woods like mahogany.

On to the free-floating aspect. Zebra's flawless shells are undrilled save for the

badge and the tiniest of vent-holes. They are 'free-floating', which is made possible by Zebra's unique tensioning and mounting hardware. We've seen free-floating drums before - Pearl's Free Floating snares, of course, and most closely to Zebra perhaps, the Australian Sleishman drums. The idea is that the shell is not penetrated by mounting hardware or lugs - the only physical contact is via the heads and their hoops. To this end, Zebra makes its own solid brass tube lugs, which connect top and bottom hoops, but are not bolted to the shells. In the case of bass drums they are fixed to end-plates on the wooden bass hoops. As for mounting, Sjoerd has developed his own Spring Action

## Also try...



### 1 GURU DRUMWORKS KIT

**We say:** "Guru offers a great range of exotic timbers from sustainable sources. Each one-off boutique kit offers personal character, craftsmanship and superb build quality."

Suspension (SAS) system. Tom brackets are attached to the tube lugs, rather than to the shells, via steel plates. This is reminiscent of Pearl's Opti-Mount (though grabbing the actual lugs not the tension bolts) and indeed Zebra uses a Pearl clamp to connect with the supporting cymbal stand. Zebra's SAS is also spring loaded, which absorbs the impact of firm playing.

Bass drum spurs are fixed to large steel plates rather than to the shell and these plates are emblazoned with a laser-cut Zebra Drums legend, making a strong visual statement.

## Hands On

Construction then is impeccable, but what of the sound? The floating nature of the tom and bass drum shells undoubtedly leads to an unhampered tone. But how does the free-floating system work? Well, the tube lugs are fixed into the bottom triple-flanged steel hoop and the resonant head just slips inside the cradle/cage and onto the hoop. The shell is then popped into the cradle where it sits on the

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## STAVE SNARE DRUM

The 14"x6" snare drum differs in utilising conventional tensioning with top and bottom heads tuned separately

## FREE FLOATING

Zebra's own brass tubular lugs are not directly attached to the tom and bass shells, thus allowing the shells themselves to be free floating



## ZEBRA STRIPES

Sjoerd van den Beuken meticulously selects his staves so their grain patterns create an alternating vertical 'zebra' striped effect

resonant head. Then the top head and hoop slip onto that. Tension bolts are inserted and as you tighten the top head the bottom head is tensioned simultaneously and equally.

So far this is quick and not at all fiddly. But it now takes 30+ turns on each rod to get up to tension. And there is resistance to each turn from special Zebra-designed non slip Thread Locks - small black shoulder-ridged washers, which stop the tension rods from detuning while also preventing any metal-to-metal contact.

Eventually, you arrive at the tension you want. With top and bottom Coated Ambassadors the two heads are indeed nigh-on the same in pitch. The sound is so clean it leans towards the anodyne rather than the grunge scale. Whether this strikes you as lacking character or whether you revel in the purity is down to personal taste and musical setting. Personally, I'm inclined to think the experience of purity may arise because most drums are never tuned that accurately and evenly top and bottom, it being such a faff reaching the bottom rods.

## Also try...



### 2 NOBLE & COOLEY CD DRUM KIT

**We say:** "N&C's updated Custom Design (CD) Maple kit is a genuine alternative to the mainstream, incorporating a bunch of unique and intelligently judged features."

Either way, the drums are fresh, responsive and punchy. With this system also, trying out different tunings - high to low - is relatively quick and painless. It therefore feels like the tuning range is increased and flexible.

Still, there will always be those who want the ability to tune top and bottom separately, in which case this is not the kit for you. But, I suspect, for most the advantage outweighs the downside. If more tonal diversity is sought, employing different weight/style heads top and bottom will add spice and sonic variety.

The free-floating fast-tuning system works wonders also on the bass drum. With intact front head - again simultaneously tuned - there is a mighty blast and ensuing rumble. You physically experience the large internal volume of the shell and yet, with the stave construction, the sound is still beautifully focused.

In short, the Zebra construction does what it says for the bass and toms. Unfortunately, I found that I couldn't get the same satisfaction with the snare. This

has conventional, separate top and bottom head tuning, an admission that most drummers will always want that flexibility with snares. But unlike with the other drums I found the terse, reedy, boxy sound unappetising. The same hollowness, which is attractive in the toms was a problem with the snare and no matter how I adjusted it I couldn't get it to fatten up. It reminded me of reviewing an ultra-expensive Ludwig titanium snare with a similarly dry clonk, so maybe the problem is personal and others will love it? **R**

**VERDICT:** Zebra offers unique free-floating resonance enhancing hardware with a single top-head tensioning system and immaculately built and finished stave shells. The resulting tone is loud, focused and pure.

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