

Traps A400 Shell-Less Drumkit

More Than Meets The Eye

by Russ Barbone

KEY NOTES

- Lightweight and portable
- Good sound quality from a compact kit
- Bass drum pedal support rods tend to vibrate

Looking for an alternative to carrying heavy gear that takes up a lot of stage space? The A400, from UK manufacturer Traps Drums, is a compact and portable version of a standard five-piece set. Much attention has been paid to attaining the closest possible feel and sound to that of a regular kit.

The A400 comes with a modular rack-mounting system, three single-headed toms, double-headed snare and bass drums, a conventional hi-hat stand, a bass drum pedal, a suspended snare basket, and two cymbal boom arms. Also included are one ride cymbal, one crash, and a set of hi-hats. The overall footprint of the entire setup is only 36" wide by 23" deep (excluding where you choose to position the hi-hat). Total weight is fifty-five pounds.

Construction

The drum frames on the A400 are made of durable ABS plastic. The drums come fitted with Remo UT heads, which are tensioned by means of standard steel rims. Steel nuts are molded into plastic frames to accept the tension rods.



The rack system combines substantial steel tubing with large mounting brackets made of ABS plastic. Mounts for all drums except the snare use a clever L-arm molded into a segmented waffle affair, which then fits into the mounting brackets. This provides virtually infinite positioning. Captive steel female inserts receive standard drumkey bolts to secure all adjustments. This system avoids stripping anything out.

The design of the rack allows the entire kit to “fold up” for transport, without having to be broken down. How practical this is, considering the fifty-five-pound weight, would be up to you.

The Drums

The bass drum is 20" in diameter and 4" deep, with two steel counterhoops, double heads, and eight tuning lugs per side. Two blue plastic arms extend on each side to mount the drum to the rack. A rubber-coated flange protrudes from the rear of the drum for attaching your bass drum pedal. The front head is black with the Traps logo on it. It also has a 4" rubber dampening pad glued to its center underside to control sympathetic vibrations. Nice!

The 10" and 12" rack toms each have one head and six tuning lugs. The 14" “floor tom” has one head and eight lugs. All toms use Remo UT PS Pinstripe heads.

The snare drum is unique in its execution. It's 12" wide by 3" deep, with two heads. The batter head is a UT BA coated, while the snare head is a UT clear snare head. The drum is fitted with sixteen-strand snares controlled by a blue ABS plastic snare throw-off that works perfectly.

The Hardware

The two cymbal boom arms have memory clamps, substantial tilters, and locking mechanisms that function flawlessly. Their height range is more than adequate. The rack mounts that hold the cymbal arms feature plastic compression sleeves to maintain position securely. The suspended snare basket comes off a vertical rack leg at 90°, and it felt solid even under intense playing.

The hi-hat stand is a professional model with all the features you'd expect. Its heavy, double-braced construction seems a little out of step with the “compact and lightweight” concept of the A400 kit, but it certainly would serve under any playing circumstances.

The bass drum pedal is a single-chain model with a double-sided beater. The clamp for the bass drum hoop is side-mounted for easy access, and there are two adjustable spurs to prevent bass drum creep.

My only complaint with the pedal is that the two sides of the reinforcing rod beneath the footboard come very close to the tops of the spurs as they slope up toward the yoke. During hard playing, they came in contact with those spurs, causing a rattling. Maybe the receiving holes on the yoke could be moved up a little, or the spurs could be a tad shorter, in order to avoid this problem.



Cymbals

The A400 kit comes with an 18" ride, a 14" crash, and 14" hi-hats. These are mid-level sheet bronze models that would be more than adequate for personal practice, band rehearsals, and even some performance settings. However, since many drummers would be likely to use their own cymbals for professional-level gigs, maybe Traps could offer the A400 sans cymbals, at a lower price.

The Sound

Overall, the A400's sound is very good. No, you don't get exactly the same sound as with conventional double-headed shells. But the snare and bass drum “mimic” shallow-depth models quite well. The bass drum isn't going to win any Bonham-imitation awards, but it is solid and punchy. The snare drum is quite surprising, with good snap and projection and no annoying buzzes or rattles.

The 10" and 12" toms complement each other well, with a sound something akin to that of a RotoTom. The 14" “floor” tom, on the other hand, sounds more like a shallow-depth floor tom than a larger RotoTom. When I rolled around the kit, the tom sizes sounded correctly matched, with no sonic holes in the sound palette.

Conclusion

The A400 is quick to set up and tear down, and it's easy to transport. The drums produce pleasing sounds that can easily fool you into thinking you're playing a larger set. And the kit's price in music stores will likely be significantly less than the list price shown. So all in all, the A400 offers a viable alternative to carrying a full-size drumkit around.

THE NUMBERS

A400\$882

An E400 electronic triggering version is also available.

Traps sets are distributed by Cappello Music Inc.

(203) 263-6329, www.trapsdrums.com, sales@cappellomusic.com