

GEAR REVIEW

SJC PATHFINDER, ALPHA, & JOSH DUN CROWD SNARES



From £179 SJC continues outsourcing its production on select lines

WORDS: TOM BRADLEY

Having recently outsourced a portion of its production to Taiwan with the creation of the Pathfinder and Navigator kits, USA custom builder SJC is now rolling out a range of affordable stand-alone snare drums, built to its exacting specifications in a Taiwanese factory.

Build

As well as this stand-alone model, the Pathfinder snare can also be found as part of a full kit series bearing the same name. The Pathfinder (reviewed in RHY271) represents a more affordable, student-friendly offering from SJC. The only wooden drum in our review collection, the 14"x6" snare, has a 7-ply agathis shell with a cherry outer veneer, finished in Crimson Super Satin Stain and topped-off with flat black hardware. The customised shell hardware includes SJC's proprietary shield lugs, drop style throw-off/butt-plate and 1.6mm triple-flanged hoops.

Benefiting from the same treatment is the Josh Dun Signature Crowd snare, which in addition to the painted hardware also has a black powder coated shell. This 14"x6½" 1mm rolled steel snare is the latest signature model from the popular Twenty One Pilots drummer who has worked closely with SJC to develop it to his specifications. The Crowd snare gets its name from Josh Dun's well-known crowd surfing stunts during which he takes a kit out on a special platform (aptly named the 'drum island') which is then passed around by the audience.

The final snare in the trio - the Alpha - features the same 14"x6½" 1mm rolled steel shell as the signature model, only instead of the matt black finish it boasts a gleaming mirror chrome, uniformly matched by polished shield lugs and 2.3mm triple-flanged hoops. The Alpha has the same drop style throw-off as the other two models and all three drums come supplied with SJC branded

AGATHIS

The Pathfinder shell is 7-ply agathis with a cherry outer veneer

Also try...



1 SJC PATHFINDER DRUM KIT

We say: "SJC embarks on a well-trodden path, setting up budget operations in Taiwan. The result is the Pathfinder, which is a good student kit"



2 SAKAE STEEL SNARE

We say: "As a brand, Sakae may be a recent arrival, but its decades of manufacturing excellence shine through in this snare."

FLAT BLACK

Powder-coated hardware lends the Josh Dun snare an alternative look

heads (made by Evans), 20-strand snare wires, a drum key and a certificate of authenticity in the box. The steel snares feature 10 lugs on each side while the Pathfinder has just eight.

Unsurprisingly, the price of each drum comes in far lower than anything we've seen from SJC in the past. In fact, you would have to pay at least twice as much to get anything from SJC's top-end American-made lines. The

Alpha and Pathfinder both come in at £179 while the Crowd snare is slightly pricier at £229. Due to the mass-produced nature of these drums each snare is only available as described, with one size option for each.

Hands On

One may be forgiven for assuming that these drums are worth considerably more than their average price of around £200. Taking the

THE SNAP OF A RIM-SHOT WITH THIS DRUM CRANKED HIGH WILL CUT LIKE A KNIFE WHETHER PLAYING FUNK, ROCK OR PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING ELSE FOR THAT MATTER

chrome Alpha snare as an example, the build quality and aesthetics punch clearly above its weight. The same could be said about the Josh Dun Crowd snare, although the head-to-toe matt black finish is sure to divide people. The skater kid in me wants to like the alternative look (particularly while offset by the bright red SJC signature shield badge), but another part of me feels that it cheapens the overall look of the drum. In terms of sound, however, the Crowd snare takes the prize for best in show. The rolled steel shell makes it a lively beast and it generates that unmistakable metallic hum when really laid into – perfect for heavier styles. At a medium to low tuning it sounds super-wide and offers a pleasingly fat backbeat. Up high, the note becomes noticeably more cutting and the

snare wires become more responsive whilst playing ghost notes. The more tension applied to the top head, the better this drum sounds. The snap of a rim-shot with the drum cranked high will cut like a knife whether you're playing funk, rock or pretty much anything else for that matter.

The Alpha, despite possessing essentially the same shell, has a dryer tonality and a lower fundamental pitch. Tuned up to the same tension, the chrome-plated shell just doesn't give the same snap that the Crowd snare offers. The dryer tone enhances the response of the wires and gives the drum an overall crisp tone. With a little extra dampening, the Alpha feels like it could sit as happily in a ballad as it would within a mighty rock tune.

Finally, the Pathfinder. Considering this drum costs the same as the Alpha, there is absolutely no competition. Of course, being the only wooden shell we were always looking at the odd one out, but it goes a little beyond that. At low tunings the agathis shell is workable but a little uninspiring. Tuned up it starts to come into its own, but just as you think you're getting somewhere you reach a dead end. At maximum tension it still feels like there should be more headroom, but it's just not there. It's worth noting that the coating from the stock SJC/Evans heads can disappear very quickly so decent replacement heads are highly recommended. **R**

VERDICT: Despite the much lower cost, SJC's Taiwanese imports manage to uphold a good level of quality overall. These are surprisingly versatile and musical snare drums, although looks are subjective.

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

Essential spec



PRICE

Crowd Snare: £229;
Alpha: £179;
Pathfinder: £179

SHELL MATERIAL

Crowd/Alpha: steel;
Pathfinder: agathis and cherry

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Crowd/Alpha:
1mm rolled;
Pathfinder: ply

NUMBER OF PLIES

Pathfinder: 7-ply with cherry outer

HOOPS

Crowd/Pathfinder:
1.6mm;
Alpha: 2.6mm

SUPPLIED HEADS

SJC/Evans

LUGS PER DRUM

Crowd/Alpha: 20;
Pathfinder: 16

CONTACT

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STEEL

The Alpha and Crowd snares feature a 1mm rolled steel shell

SHIELD LUGS

All three snares feature SJC's chunky shield lugs

BADGE

Each snare features SJC's distinctive shield badge