

## Comparing the Titans: the Yamaha DTXtreme and the Roland V-Session By Rick Long

I recently had the opportunity to compare the Yamaha DTXtreme and Roland V-Session electronic drum kits "head to head" with the help of Yamaha endorsee Russ Miller, one of the busiest drummers in the Los Angeles area. Having already reviewed both kits for Modern Drummer magazine, it has been evident to me for some time that they are two different animals. The goal here is to examine the differences between the kits so that you can help your customers make an informed decision about which kit is right for their needs.

Both kits include the capability to create virtual drums by selecting shell and head types as well as other parameters like muffling and snare strainer tension. Each module has a mixer that helps get the kit's balance correct and multiple outputs for routing the various drum and cymbal sounds to separate channels on a PA system or studio mixing console.

The DTXtreme is shipped with one crash cymbal and the V-Session kit comes stock with two. You can add a second crash cymbal to the DTXtreme you will need to use a BP80 Bar Pad since the auxiliary inputs are configured for the rim switch of the PCY80S stereo cymbal pad.

V-Drums are designed to work with mesh heads while the DTXtreme is supplied with Mylar heads but can accept aftermarket mesh heads. If mesh heads are used on DTXtreme pads, replace the foam pads under the Mylar heads with the waffle-topped foam pads included with the kit. This will quiet down the DTXtreme pads dramatically.

As for color, the V-Session pads and rack have a striking red finish. The Yamaha pads have a more subtle natural wood finish with an aluminum colored rack. Some drummers will prefer one over the other but it is important to point out that both these colors are a step in the right direction for e-drums. The finish on an acoustic drum kit is one of the major considerations a drummer makes when purchasing new equipment. More color options for e-drums will increase consumer interest.

The major differences between the kits are found inside the sound modules. The DTXtreme offers more individual drum voices than the Roland TD-10 but since both kits allow you to create virtual drums, multitudes of custom drum sounds can be achieved with either module.

The V-Session kit with the included TDW-1 expansion board for V-Cymbals has the edge (literally) in the ride cymbal category. Both kits have three zone ride cymbal arrangements but the new TDW-1 ride cymbal sounds combined with a V-Cymbal ride pad comes very close to the experience of playing an acoustic ride cymbal.

The DTXtreme cymbal sounds have more of a recorded type of sound. By this, I mean that they tend to sound much more like cymbals you would hear on a CD or on the radio

when listening to recorded music. The V-Session cymbals have more presence and have a "live" acoustic cymbal sound. Customers who intend to use the e-drum kit in a home studio situation may prefer the cymbal sounds of the DTXtreme while drummers intending to use their kit in live situations may prefer the V-Drum sounds.

The DTXtreme has a SmartCard slot that has several important uses. The most obvious is to use a SmartCard as a storage device for the module's internal memory data. Another not so obvious use is to hold sequence files that can be played back using the module's General MIDI sound set. The DTXtreme module is a one-box answer for MIDI bands that don't mind staying within the General MIDI sound set.

Drummers will like the fact that the SmartCard can hold sample data (.aiff format). This allows players to record their favorite drums, cymbals, or any sound for that matter, and have it load into the module so that those sounds can be assigned to a pad. The limitations are that the DTXtreme internal memory can only hold 4MB of data and only mono samples will playback. There is also a slightly darker quality to the sound than when the same sample is played back through a Yamaha A3000 stand-alone sampler.

As for tracking, the V-Drum pads have the best response available at the present time. V-Drum pads are sensitive enough to track brushes but the brush response is not exactly like an acoustic drum. If you press the brush into the head, the V-Drum doesn't track that movement like an acoustic drum would.

During the comparison, we thought the DTXtreme had more output volume than the V-Session kit. I later found this to be due to the fact that the V-Session "drum group" volume was not at the max setting. Moving this setting up to 127 greatly increases output of this module.

Now for the two biggest differences. First is the user interface. The DTXtreme uses a text-based interface similar to the original DTX. The interface works but is more difficult to master when a drummer is first getting into e-drums. The V-Drum system is more graphic oriented with easy to follow menus and illustrations. Text-based data is often displayed along side the graphics so drummers with experience in sound module editing can use either system. Yamaha's menu structure tends to place all parameters for voices in one area. The V-Drum system spreads these parameters between instrument, studio, and control room categories. These resemble real-life settings and will be easier for new users to conceptualize. Drummers that have experience with sound module editing may prefer the text and numerical based DTXtreme interface.

The second biggest difference, and perhaps the one most near and dear to consumer's hearts, is price. The DTXtreme DSXT11 lists for \$4600.00 and sells for \$3699.99. The V-Session lists for \$6295.00 and sells for 4995.99. At street pricing, the difference between the kits comes down to \$1296.00. To justify either purchase, the consumer with the help of sales personnel, must determine the following decision points: whether the kit will be used primarily in a home studio setting, a live setting, or both; if the kit will be used as part of a MIDI band where live music is mixed with sequencing; whether or not

samples of acoustic drums or other sounds is desired; and which user interface the customer prefers. As outlined above, each kit has strengths in certain areas.

Many thanks to Russ Miller for taking the time to be a part of this review. For more information on Russ, visit his website at "<http://www.russmiller.com>" [www.russmiller.com](http://www.russmiller.com).