

Getting In Tune with DTS

Every once in a while a product comes along that does exactly what the manufacturer claims it will.

Drum Tech, the company who manufactures the new DTS One Touch Tuning System, states and claims that the DTS system “simplifies and improves the drum tuning process.” Well, hearing is believing, so **DRUMHEAD** took them up on their claim.

There are many different methods for tuning a drum, and much discussion among drummers about how to do it includes: head thickness and weight, type of Mylar, drum dimensions, bearing edges and the relationship between top and bottom head tension, to name a few. Regardless of how you do it, there is one general consensus that rings true no matter: an out-of-tune drum sounds as unpleasant as an out-of-tune violin.

Most tuning methodology is based on an even tension across the surface of the head. This methodology has been well served by a variety of tools and tension-measuring devices, such as various aids in the form of tuning keys and tension meters, all invented to facilitate even tension from rod to rod. This is where the DTS system really stands out. With conventional tuning, head tension is provided by threaded tension rods tightening down on the hoop of the drum, and applying “pull” to the drumhead as it stretches the head across the edge of the shell. As we all know, even the slightest turn on one tension rod causes a profound change in the pitch of the drum and evenness of head. Achieving an even tension around all lug points on the drum can be a difficult task. Tapping around the edge of the head in an effort to hear the tension differences from rod to rod can produce many uncontrollable overtones, often making it difficult to gauge even tension for optimal tuning.

The DTS tuning system is based on an even application of leverage across all the rods simultaneously, via tension that is applied by a cable surrounding the entire hoop. By turning one screw, the cable tightens down on ‘all’ of, either 6, 8 or 10 (depending upon the number of lugs) small brackets individually attached to each rod. Thus these brackets act as little levers, applying a downward force evenly

to the hoop and head as the cable tension is increased.

The cable tension is adjusted with a hex wrench into the head of a screw located on the tension block, to which both the ends of the cable are attached. From there, the tension on the cable is distributed evenly around the drum, providing uniform tension across the head, and the ability to adjust the pitch of the drum with one adjustment. With the DTS system installed on both the top and bottom heads, the proper pitch relationship between the heads can easily be found by “sweep tuning” the heads as you strike the drum. Another nice feature is that the drum can remain mounted either on the kick drum or a stand, while you tune either head, making it very easy to hear when the drum comes into tune with itself, and giving you a truer sense of it’s pitch. We all know that when you hold a drum and strike it, it sounds completely different when you then mount it and strike it again.

Testing the system at Drumhead HQ, a.k.a Skyline Studios NYC, we found the initial installation of the DTS system to be a little bit fussy, but no more difficult than, say, installing a RIMS-type mounting system to a drum. The good thing is, once you’ve got the hang of installing the cable and brackets on one drum, the rest come much more quickly and easily. Like anything, learning something new can take a little time, so be patient.

Once the system was installed on the top and bottom heads of our kit, we were able to tune the



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drums effortlessly while seated behind the kit. An evenly tuned tom head produces a melodic, bell-like tone throughout the range of tuning and this was simply achieved with the DTS One Touch. A great benefit was the ability of being able to immediately tune the resonant head on a mounted drum, making it impossible not to hear when the bottom head reached full resonance with the batter head. The drum begins to “open up” as you sweep-tune the resonant head and there is an obvious point of tune where the drum sounds ‘rich’ and really begins to sing out.

Another benefit of the DTS system is that the de-tuning of the drum due to the tension rods turning out during playing becomes impossible since the tension of the head is being evenly held in place by the cable and the brackets.

The system is rather unobtrusive-looking on a drum and does not detract from the aesthetics of the kit at all, providing that the tension block faces the player, and is not really visible from the audience’s perspective. But even if it were, the chrome plating and materials used are of high-quality fit and finish, making it very acceptable.

If you are an “advanced” drum tuner who uses individual lug tuning and de-tuning



methods to produce pitch-bend effects, you can still benefit greatly from the DTS system mounted to the resonant heads.

Once you’ve experienced the quickness and ease of “sweep-tuning” your drums with one adjustment, you’ll be hooked. Experimenting with different pitches and tuning relationships between toms is fast and easy.

The DTS system is not a cure-all for an ill drum. The system assumes that the bearing edges are true, the heads are in good condition and of good quality and, importantly, that the hoops are flat. If your drums are in nice shape, Drum Tech’s DTS One Touch system makes drum tuning fast and easy, which is exactly what Drum Tech claims it will do. *

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