



Sontronics Drum Mics

More British-designed condenser drum mics Words: Oli Bell Images: Eckie

HEADS UP SONTRONICS DRUM MICS

Sontronics DM-1T/DM-1S
£119 each
Sontronics DM-1B
£299

▲ UPBEATS:

- Pleasingly natural, detailed sound (DM-1T/S)
- Compact size (DM-1T/S)
- Great sound (DM-1B)
- Handles all a kick can throw at it (DM-1B)
- Nice build quality (DM-1B)
- Handsome looks (DM-1B)
- Lifetime warranty (DM-1B)

▼ DOWNBEATS:

- Bog-standard clips not really great (DM-1T/S) *
- Pad switch fiddly (DM-1T/S)
- Pricy (DM-1B)
- Heavy for cheaper/flimsy boom stands (DM-1B)
- Not immediately obvious it's end-fire (DM-1B)

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Whether you're posting your videos on YouTube or recording your drums (and your band) at home or in the studio, you want a decent clarity of sound. The source of that sound relies on a decent set of drum mics. We have a set of British-designed mics here, let's put them through their paces.

DM-1T/DM-1S

The DM-1T and DM-1S are both small-diaphragm, pencil-style condenser mics that look pretty much identical apart from their name on the body (T for the tom mic and S for the snare, perhaps unsurprisingly). Both mics use a cardioid polar pattern and are quite compact, measuring just 9cm in length, but feel satisfyingly sturdy in the hand at a trickle over 100g in weight. Each mic comes equipped with a -10dB pad switch to help cope with the high sound levels they are going to have to deal with. Although a welcome addition, I did find the indented switch extremely fiddly to use, and it wasn't immediately obvious visually whether the pad was switched on or not – perhaps the first indication that some corners had been shaved to keep prices down?

The other area in which costs have been kept low is the included mounting clips. Both my trusted session drummer and I recognised the mounts as being very similar to an off-the-shelf low-cost brand that's out there, and although the metal construction seems sturdy enough, we did have a few problems getting them to fit snugly on both toms and snare. Also, once attached to a drum, the clips are rather large and intrusive, but they do the job, if not in a particularly robust or elegant fashion.

Response frequencies for both mics are quoted at 30Hz – 20kHz, and although there is no specific data, there have been slight tweaks in the way the DM-1T and DM-1S respond to certain core frequencies to focus in on the characteristics of their specific drum. This seems to have been pretty successful, as in practice both mics do a great job providing a detailed, fast response to their respective drums. Toms sounded well rounded and full-bodied, with the DM-1T giving a good, open, natural sound that captures the feel of the toms very well. The DM-1S also performed well, capturing the full sound of the

“THE DM-1T AND DM-1S: BOTH PROVIDED A PLEASINGLY NATURAL, SOLID SOUND STRAIGHT OFF THE BAT”

snare from the sharp attack to the body and weight. I was particularly impressed with how the mic responded to a brushed snare, which brought out all the detail and subtle strokes while keeping the essential crisp edge.

Niggles with the clips and pad



switch aside, I was quite impressed with both the DM-1T and DM-1S: both provided a pleasingly natural, solid sound straight off the bat and should give a good, firm foundation on which to build a drum recording.

DM-1B

The DM-1B is a large-diaphragm condenser mic designed for kick drum and bass instrument duties. Coming packed in its own aluminium mini flight case, first impressions are good as it's an incredibly handsome-looking mic. At just over 800g it feels substantial in the hand and has the slightly reminiscent styling of a classic vocal condenser mic with its side mesh grilling. Don't let this fool you, though (as it nearly did me), as this mic is strictly an end-fire cardioid polar pattern, meaning the top gets pointed towards the kick, not the front. On the reverse of the mic is a -15dB pad switch (a proper one this time, thankfully) – and that's it, nice and simple; shove it in front of/inside your bass drum and off you go.

Sound-wise the DM-1B lives up to its good looks and had both my drummer and me smiling after just a few minutes. The mic's response was both detailed and fast, but also with the required depth and

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bass, and stood up to all the sound pressure levels we could throw at it without a problem. We tested the mic on a boomy 18" jazz kick and it handled the task with gusto, providing a really natural-sounding result, so I have no doubt it would perform just as well on a tighter, more focused rock or pop kick.

Sontronics say that the DM-1B also works well on other bass sound sources, like bass guitar cabs. Not having one handy I did try it out on a normal guitar amp and a bass-heavy synth with some good results, as well as (unusually) mic'ing the bottom of a conga to see if it would handle the resonance and boom – which it did.

The only slight niggle we could find with the DM-1B was, because of its weight, it was a touch too heavy for the rather weedy (read 'cheap') boom stand I was initially using, so a good-quality stand is a must.

Price-wise the DM-1B isn't cheap compared to the usual kick drum

mics available, but if your budget will stretch it's well worth giving it a try, especially for recording duties where this condenser adds some extra depth and scope compared to its dynamic competitors.

CONCLUSION

As well as being well known for producing ribbon mics, Sontronics seem to excel in making condenser mics that twin great results with an eye for good value for money. The DM-1T/DM-1S handle their respective tom/snare mic'ing duties without fuss (slight clamp issues aside) and provide a clean, detailed response that easily compares to microphones that cost a fair bit more than their reasonably modest price tag. For me, though, the star of the bunch is the DM-1B, which although isn't cheap, exudes quality and gives some outstanding natural-sounding results on a kick drum.

