

ATTACK

ASSORTED DRUMHEADS

by J.R. Frondelli

I often root for the underdog. Perhaps it's the product of a lifelong affection for my beloved New York Mets. And like many people, I love a good deal. Good deals tend to fly under the radar. In the world of musical instruments, there are many mid-line or even entry-level products that yield essentially the same results as their flagship counterparts. This month we're reviewing one of these drum industry underdogs, Attack drumheads.

ATTACK AND CONQUER

About a year ago, a friend gave me some drumheads he didn't need anymore. Among them was a lone Attack snare head, the Bobby Rondinelli signature model. Shortly thereafter, while searching for the right sound for one of my snares, I threw on the Attack head, not expecting much at all. A year later, that head is still on the drum, and it still sounds good!

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

My revelation led me here, to a comprehensive review of Attack drumheads. Credit goes to Tom Shelley, owner of Universal Percussion, the home of Attack heads, which are the brainchild of Shelley and his partner, Jim Bickley. Their intention was to create a lower-cost yet viable and decent-sounding drumhead aimed at the more frugal player. My mission with this review was to find out if Attack heads have been victim to the phenomenon of lower-price products being perceived by many consumers as lower quality.

Attack heads are made in Taiwan. They utilize a crimped-hoop design. The film is held mechanically in the hoop rather than glued, a system pioneered by Ludwig (which still uses it) back in the late '50s. The other three major drumhead manufacturers—Remo, Evans, and Aquarian—utilize a glued-hoop design. Both systems are excellent, but the crimped-hoop design does make it nearly impossible for the head to ever pull from the hoop, as there is no glue to snap, crackle, and give up under an excessive load. It's a weightier system, because the film is wrapped around a metal core rod and then encircled by an open metal sleeve that is crimped mechanically over the rod and film. Extra weight at the bearing edge of a drum, however, will generally translate to a meatier attack and longer sustain.

Like other drumheads, Attack models are made from PET (polyethylene terephthalate) film. Attack's version is called Dynaflex, with



the exception of the Terry Bozzio series heads, which are constructed from the more familiar DuPont-branded Mylar PET film. Each film has its own sonic properties.

TESTING, TESTING... ONE, TWO...

The test platform I chose was my early-'90s Ludwig 6-ply kit, in the popular sizes 8x10, 8x12, 13x14, and 16x22. These drums possess fairly thick and somewhat stiff maple/poplar shells, sharp bearing edges, and lacquered interiors, all of which translate to

mostly head tone—after all, I wanted to hear the heads, not the shells. The snare drum I used was a 5½x14 Pearl brass Sensitone, which is representative of most popular, moderately priced brass drums. No isolation mounts were employed on the toms, and no muffling of any kind was applied.

Attack Drumhead Specification Chart

KEY: C = Coated D = Dynaflex M = Mylar R = No Overtone ring T = Tone Ridge

Model #	Description	Film	Plies	Treatment
TOM HEADS				
<i>in mil</i>				
DHTS-x	1-ply thin clear	D	7.5	
DHAx	1-ply medium clear	D	10	
DHAxC	1-ply medium coated	D	10	C
DHTS2-x	2-ply medium-thin clear	D	7.5 + 4	
DHTS2-xC	2-ply medium-thin coated	D	7.5 + 4	C
DHx	2-ply medium clear	D	7.5 + 7.5	T
TBx	Terry Bozzio 1-ply clear	M	10	
TBxC	Terry Bozzio 1-ply coated	M	10	C

BASS DRUM HEADS

SWNOx	1-ply medium No Overtone	D	10	R
DHNOx	1-ply medium No Overtone clear	D	10	R
DHTS3NOx	2-ply medium No Overtone clear	D	5 + 5	R
DHTS2-x	2-ply medium-thin clear	D	7.5 + 4	
DHx	2-ply medium clear	D	7.5 + 7.5	T
TBNOx	Terry Bozzio 1-ply clear	M	10	R

SNARE DRUM HEADS

DHA14C	1-ply medium coated	D	10	C
DHTS2-14C	2-ply medium-thin coated	D	7.5 + 4	C
DH14C	2-ply medium coated	D	7.5 + 7.5	C + T
DHA14BB	2-ply heavy coated	D	10 + 10	C
BR14C	1-ply medium coated w/ reverse dot	D	10	C + dot
TB14C	Terry Bozzio 1-ply medium coated	M	10	C
SS14T	snare-side thin clear	D	4	
SS14M	snare-side thin clear	D	5	



On the toms, I used the supplied DHTS-x thin clear heads as resonants. On the bass drum, the SWNO22 Smooth White No Overtone was used as the resonant head, with no port. I tested the snare batters with my regular snare-side heads still on, and then I tested each Attack snare-side head with my original batter back on so that I could isolate the response of the resonant head.

All batter heads were tested at their own optimal tension range. Some heads were better at certain tensions than others, so I didn't impose my own tuning preferences. Specifications and sonic findings are listed in the included table.

THE VERDICT

I was pleasantly surprised, and sometimes downright knocked out, by the sound and quality of these heads. They all tuned up very easily with minimal fuss, a sure sign that the film was correctly mounted in the hoops. Dynaflex takes a good pounding without denting easily and has nearly no break-in period. The material isn't quite as warm sounding as Mylar, and it possesses a somewhat narrower tuning range. But it

does have an excellent voice with a lot of attack and good sustain.

I thoroughly enjoyed testing these heads and found some awesome sounds that I would never have heard from these drums had I maintained my prejudicial attitude toward my long-standing skins of choice. Of particular note are the No Overtone bass drum heads. Imagine an unported, unmuffled bass drum that has all the punch and attack of a kick with a ported reso head, plus a round tone and excellent rebound. If you want more overtones from your bass drum, there are other Attack heads that do offer them.

I also loved the Tone Ridge heads, which incorporate a pressed-in ridge with bonded seams near the perimeter of the head to quell overtones naturally, without the need for extraneous damping materials. If you want the epitome of fatback on your snare, there's the DHA14BB Blast Beat head, which is extra-heavy yet still fairly sensitive and maintained a fat tone throughout its medium-low to medium-high tuning range. If it's a crackin' rock snare sound you want, look no further than the powerful-sounding Bobby Rondinelli signature head. It's worth noting that Attack heads work best around the medium tuning range. Exceptions to this are noted in the table.

AND THEN THERE'S BOZZIO...

Terry Bozzio is in a class all by himself. He's an anomaly, a consummate perfectionist who can play anything, and he sports one of the biggest drumkits ever to grace a stage. When Bozzio set out to have the absolute best heads made for his kit, he sought out Attack. His signature models are constructed of DuPont Mylar S film. Per the drummer's specs, the collars of the heads are a bit deeper and sharper, to mate perfectly with the bearing edges of the drums. These heads will work well on any modern drum with relatively sharp bearing edges. They seat easily, and the deeper collar maximizes sustain.

The Terry Bozzio signature heads are not unlike the single-ply coated heads I loved using in my younger days, with super tunability, great feel and rebound, a lot of depth and dimension, and a seemingly indestructible coating. Bozzio's heads are more "uptown" than regular Attack models, which is reflected in the 33 percent higher list price.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

Perceived value can cripple your wallet, but a higher-price item is not necessarily better. Attack heads might be priced lower than the competition, but there's nothing lowbrow about them.

universalpercussion.com/attack

Comments

Resonant head. Can also be used as thin batter head. Open and punchy with no odd overtones and nice ring.
Good attack. Open, solid tone with fair amount of ring. Projects true note out front.
Good attack. Open, solid tone with more focus than clear DHAX. Projects true note out front.
Thin-Skin 2. Good attack. Open yet controlled tonality. Excellent feel. Wide tuning range.
Thin-Skin 2. Good attack. Round sounding with good focus and excellent feel. A bit darker than DHTS2-x.
Wet and punchy with thick attack. Favors medium-low to medium tuning. Tone Ridge controls ring nicely.
Excellent depth and warmth with bright attack and good amount of musical ring. Wide tuning range.
Excellent depth and warmth with solid attack and fair amount of musical ring. Wide tuning range. Solid feel.
Smooth white resonant head. Big sound. Punchy with no overtones.
Very big, solid, punchy sound with no overtones. Great attack and focus.
Thin-Skin 3. Similar to DHNOx but bigger, rounder, and a bit livelier.
Thin-Skin 2. Lots of attack and punch. Will need muffling for most applications. Great for a Bonham-type sound.
Nice "bump" and thick attack. Somewhat focused with some complexity. Tone Ridge provides good ring control.
Excellent depth and warmth with solid attack. Good focus with no overtones. Wide tuning range.
Good sensitivity and feel. Moderate musical ring. Coating has good brush response and durability.
Thin-Skin 2. Good sensitivity. Softer calf-like feel. Wide tuning range with pleasant overtones.
Excellent crack. A hint of dryness, a touch of ring, and good focus. Tone Ridge controls overtones.
Blast Beat model. Very thick and compressed sounding. Great for fatback. Sensitive with wide tuning range.
Very live sounding with good focus and sensitivity. Dot yields great impact sound. Great rimshots.
Excellent depth and warmth with fair amount of musical ring. Solid feel and excellent coating for brushwork.
Excellent snare response. Great for controlling drum resonance without darkening snare sound.
Excellent snare response. Good for controlling drum resonance and calming down an overly bright snare sound.