

DrumFrame VX-EZ

A New Way To “Kick Back” On Your Kit

HITS

slanted setup offers great playability

easily adjustable hardware

bass drum suspension mechanism
makes drum rugs obsolete

comfortable, adjustable drum chair

MISSES

bass drum setup may require some
overtime on your part

by Will Romano

Educator and drummer Bob Gatzen created the original DrumFrame a few years ago. In a nutshell, it combined the concept of a drum rack with an ergonomically tilted seat and drum supports. The Reclined Performance Mechanism design was specifically intended to allow drummers to play for longer periods of time with greater ease and comfort. The unit was admittedly a little strange-looking (some drummers said it was half drum rack and half Barcolounger), but it earned the support (pardon the pun) of such notables as Will Kennedy, Billy Ashbaugh, and Tony Royster Jr.

Ergonomic benefits aside, the original DrumFrame was a pretty massive unit. Recognizing this, Bob Gatzen has created a more scaled-down version called the VX-EZ. The new model (distributed by Kaman Music Corporation) is a half-rack suspension system that can be used with free-standing hardware. Our review model came with an assortment of Gibraltar hardware, including clamps, ball-arm tom holders, and three 9509MB mini boom cymbal stands. Let's take a look at this leaner, meaner DrumFrame.

An EZ Set-up

The initial set-up was a breeze. I quickly pieced together the basic floor unit, which consisted of two wing-shaped footings with a triangular sliding bar running between them. That bar (along with many other pieces in this system) was adjusted via tension rods on triangular-shaped fasteners.

I then slid a 25" tube into the “far” base, which served as a vertical root post for the entire system. An L-shaped arm (used to hold the 9506NL legless snare drum stand) was then placed into its own separate hole. Next, another triangular rod (on which the chair cushions would rest) was slipped into the “near” base footing. A 22" horizontal bar and a swivel clamp (attached to the vertical pole via triangular adjuster) was attached to the left side of the frame.

The EZ began to take shape when I added two contoured winged plates (which feature adjustable legs). After tightening four Allen bolts, I had a slanted platform on which to play. These two wing plates would act as a resting pad for the lip of my bass drum, the bass drum pedal, and the hi-hat. With the help of hook-and-loop fastener strips, the Gibraltar 9707NL legless hi-hat stand and the bass drum pedal were held secure. (More about that later.) I was free to place whatever clamps I needed on the 22" horizontal bar in order to attach my equipment.





The DrumFrame In Action

When I had the kit assembled and I sat on the reclining seat, it seemed as though all the hardware was “falling into” me. I thought at first that there was no way I could play at such a pronounced angle. But I was wrong. Once I got comfortable I found that I liked the sensation of hovering over the kit. I now liken using my regular setup to riding a bicycle without a seat: it’s a bumpy ride, and it stings.

If the DrumFrame does anything, it forces you to take a serious look at the ergonomics of drumming. I wasn’t “pushing” in order to play. I just dropped my sticks and the playing surfaces were right there for me. I played two-handed 16th-note rhythms on my hi-hat with ease. Because the Gibraltar 9707 NL hi-hat stand had no legs, I was able to place it in an extremely convenient position that would be virtually impossible with my standard kit.

The 9707 NL was kept grounded via an L-rod and a Gibraltar SC-BGC grabber clamp attached to the DrumFrame’s 22” horizontal bar. I initially thought that the hi-hat stand would have no flexibility because it was locked to the bar, but I found that it could be moved anywhere along the floor panel.

The 9506NL legless snare stand was a nice touch, if not the coolest-looking feature of the rig. The stand, held up by the middle L-shaped post mentioned earlier, appears to be floating in mid air. The snare stand’s rotation arm allowed for great mobility. And as a testament to just how much you’ll change your own setup, I played

for most of the time with the snare very high next to the hi-hat. I don’t normally do that, but for some reason it just felt right, given the angle of the platform and my seat position.

The three-cushion throne had a lot to do with my overall playing comfort. There was a headrest, a mid-back cushion, and, of course, a firm seat. An adjustable rod that runs between the two ends of the base unit allowed me to sit as close to or as far away from the kit as I liked (at least as far as the sliding bar would allow). The sitting angle could be finely adjusted by rotating a lever on the underside of the seat. While the chair does come loose after repeat uses (nothing a quick tightening of the screws won’t solve), this seat offers features that escape most drum thrones. I felt that I could play for hours. And I soon realized that the angle of the chair virtually *forced* me to lean back and use it as support.

Slightly Off Bass

If there was any trouble spot in the set-up process for me, it was the bass drum rig. Because the bass drum needs to be lifted off the ground, I found it tedious to get all the equipment lined up properly.

I applied the suspension bass drum mount to the bottom of the drum where four tension rods held it in place (two on the front, two on the back). To stabilize the mount, a rod footing with two rubber stoppers on each end is employed. In addition, a small black metal cylinder slid through an adjustable clamp on the footing, which ele-

vated or lowered the angle of the drum. Once I had the equipment securely attached, I hung the front end of the kick over the right floor plate. I then used the swivel clamp on the 22" center vertical post to attach a bass-drum hoop clamp. The hoop clamp kept the drum from sliding or falling. While this process was time consuming, I should also mention that on the very next break-down and set-up, the assembly time improved.

At The Bottom Of Things

Our EZ review unit was shipped with a Gibraltar Intruder II model IDP-C double bass pedal. But since I'm not a double bass drum player and I felt that the Gibraltar pedal was a bit stiff, I switched to my trusty single DW 5000, which clung to two adhesive hook-and-loop strips. I placed the pedal at a comfortable angle and never really gave much thought to repositioning it after that.

Because of the DrumFrame's bass-drum suspension system, you no longer need a drum rug. The entire framework was secure on any surface, soft or hard. The DrumFrame is made of aluminum alloy, employing the same processes used by the aeronautics industry. No matter how hard I hit (and I really didn't need to hit hard), I was never worried about the 'Frame's stability.

And I loved the feel. When I sat down on the cushy throne, the entire edifice became a resonant and rocking contraption. My whole body was shaking, feeling every beat. While you might think that this was a drawback, in reality I felt more closely connected to the playing surfaces than ever before. The "Shared Vibrational Energy" that the DrumFrame creates between the suspended drums offered a slight increase in volume and resonance from the bass drum and toms, making it a pleasure to play the drums.

I would recommend that if you use the 'Frame on repeated gigs, you keep markers on the metal as to how far back to slide the bars, how high the horizontal main bar should be, etc. While most setups present similar problems, the one thing that works against the DrumFrame is that there is interconnected hardware. You really have to get this down to a science in order to enjoy the 'Frame's full potential.

Configuration Options

I wanted to see how many different configurations could be had by using the DrumFrame EZ, so I hung a 12" tom off a 9509MB mini boom crash cymbal stand on my left via a Gibraltar SC-BAHR ball-arm rod post holder and an SC-BGC grabber clamp. The tom

arm's rotation was very handy when trying to find the approximate spot for the tom. A 13" tom was firmly planted on the horizontal center rod via an SC-BAHR and the center bar's triangular adjustable clamp. A 16" suspended floor tom was attached to a boom ride stand via an SC-BGC and an SC-BAHR.

Though I had no complaints about mobility in this situation, I wanted to tinker a bit more. I placed two toms in front of me: the 12" hanging from the main horizontal bar and the 13" hanging off the ride cymbal stand. The 16" was placed on its own separate boom stand on the hard right. Overall, floating toms seem to work best with this system. I briefly tried a legged floor tom, but it was tough to position at a comfortable striking distance. The 'Frame's metal floor plate kept getting in the way.

There were still other setup options. For instance, if you have a double tom holder, you can place two toms on the horizontal bar without using a cymbal stand on your left (if you are right-handed player). You may also be able to slip the double tom holder into a clamp and hang that off the cymbal stand, leaving the horizontal bar for the hi-hat stand. This, however, seems to be a bit of a waste of bar space. It may also be a strain on the grabber clamp.

The Wrap-Up

The DrumFrame helped me to see my own setup from a different perspective. While setting up at a gig, I always seem to be fighting myself, sometimes guessing where my foot pedals and snare stand should be placed. I'm either claustrophobic or too liberal with the spacing of the equipment. Along with its ergonomic benefits, the DrumFrame is designed to allow highly accurate positioning time after time. It made playing so joyful that going back to my ordinary stand-alone kit seemed a bit of a letdown. The DrumFrame VX-EZ isn't cheap, but considering all the advantages it offers, I consider it a worthwhile investment.

| THE NUMBERS | |
|---|-------------------|
| DrumFrame VX-EZ System (complete) | \$1,099.95 |
| 9509MB Gibraltar Mini Boom Stand | 139.95 |
| SC-BGC Basic Grabber Clamp | 24.95 |
| SC-BAHR Gibraltar Ball Arm w/ Hexagonal Rod Post | 39.95 |
| 9506NL Gibraltar Legless Snare Drum Stand | 99.50 |
| 9707NL Gibraltar Legless Hi-Hat Stand | 155.95 |
| IDP-CB Gibraltar Intruder II Double Pedal with gig bag | 435.50 |
| (866) 645-8540, www.DrumFrame.com , www.kaman.com . | |

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