

Jim Kilpatrick on tuning an HTS200

...courtesy of:



Because the snare drum has an indefinite pitch, if you ask a dozen drummers how they tune a pipe band snare drum you will get a dozen different answers. For example, one drummer will say he gets the best results by throwing the top snares off while tuning the bottom snares; another drummer will say the best way of achieving a sharp crisp sound is to bake your top heads in an oven for 20 minutes before fitting them to the drum (!). I really think that some pipe band drummers have lost their goal of how to produce the best sound.

I would like to explain how I tune my snare drum. Firstly I should tell you what I use. I play an HTS200 snare drum. The top head is the Premier Tendura and the bottom head is the Premier 8303 snare head. Let's start at the point where both heads are in place, having been fitted into their respective counter hoops. All tension rods should have been lubricated and loosely screwed into the inserts. If you find that the tension bolt is hard to turn, you must take it out and start again. Chances are that you will have cross-threaded the tension rod. I always start with the top head.

Screw the tension rods down evenly until the head of the rods sit onto the stress ring or top hoop. You may have to go back over the rods to make sure they are in evenly. In the past, drummers have been advised to either tension diagonally across the drum or by tensioning every alternate rod. This is not so important when using a Kevlar head. What is important is that when tensioning a Kevlar head you must only give the key an eighth of a turn at the most at a time. Take a couple of days to bring up the tension on your top head - yes, that long (you cannot do it in an hour or even a day). The tightness of the top head has to be left to the individual drummer. Take the head up to where you think it will sound best. Remember that you can always go back to the top head at any time after setting up the rest of the drum. I always take the height and tension off the top snare before setting it up. Take the top snare upwards until you feel it pressing against the top head. At this stage you will have a sound which can be worked on. I then go to the bottom head.

Tension the bottom head in the same way. You will find that the bottom head, being made of plastic, will stretch far more than the top head. You should tension the bottom head to the point where you find it quite hard to depress the head with your thumb. Remember, if you want a high pitch drum with good snare definition you need to have your bottom head very tight. Set the bottom snare wires very loosely. You should be able to run your fingers down the snare and feel the snare wires bending freely. Make sure the four corners of the bottom snare wires are set evenly onto the bottom head. Your drum is now ready to be fine tuned to the sound and projection that suits your style of playing. You have to keep adjusting the tension of the top and bottom snares (not the height, you set that earlier) to produce your ideal sound. If you think the drum sounds dull or a bit flat, don't start tensioning the heads, try to adjust your snare tensions first. You can produce a wider variety of sounds by setting your snares properly than by applying more tension to the heads.

