



Larry Cox Drums

— Explore The Difference

BUYING DRUM GEAR



Access the accompanying video here:

<https://www.larrycoxdrums.com/buying-drum-gear>
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If there are any words of wisdom that I would stress as hard and fast rules regarding buying drum gear, it would be these:

There's no such thing as "the best" . . . no best drum manufacturer, no best shell material, no best heads, no best sticks, no best hardware, no best cymbals and no best drums. Everything is subjective. Everyone has their particular likes, dislikes and preferences.

Likewise, there is nothing in particular that I will teach you here that will in-and-of-itself be the all-encompassing solution to buying the gear that you need. In the end, you are the only one that can do that. Take my advice, do your own research and then make your best educated decisions.

Buying drum gear isn't cheap and it's big decisions for you and your wallet. So, how do you begin? Well, I can tell you that it's **not** by asking other drummers what to buy. I find nothing more annoying than seeing this question on a post in some drumming group on Facebook, "*I'm looking to buy <insert whatever piece of gear here>, what kind should I get?*" Aside from sorting through the responses from some complete idiots, the person is then faced with 91 responses that are all over the map, encompassing 11 different brands that are all "the best", along with recommendations that differ as much the personalities of those who respond to the question. Completely **USELESS** as far as I am concerned.

Next comes the manufacturers themselves. As far as every drum manufacturer is concerned, they make the best drums. And in all honesty, as a former business owner of multiple businesses, and varying business models, you need to have that kind of confidence to become successful and **stay** successful. However, it doesn't make what they tell you the end-all in fact-finding during your search for what to buy. Every drum company website looks appealing and makes me want to buy a set of their drums.

They inundate you with information and product overload. As a matter of fact, it's almost as if each manufacturer is competing against themselves with all of the different lines/levels/series of drums that they offer. As if it isn't difficult enough trying to choose a brand, then you are faced with seven different lines of drums with each manufacturer. Of course, in the end it mostly comes down to cost for the majority of drummers anyway, but we'll get to that.





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So, regarding drums themselves, in the end it's all about marketing and visual appeal and nothing about concrete factual reality regarding and major sound differentiation between brands. I can confidently say this, knowing that I am 100% correct, because I have played top-of-the-line drums and I have customized economy line drums, making them sound fantastic, for over 40 years. And when all is said and done, the disparity in sound quality between those two worlds is virtually undetectable. Every drum has the potential for sounding great. This is how I know that a drum, is a drum, is a drum.

With cymbals, stands, hardware and other miscellaneous gear it's not quite so cut and dry. With these items it boils down to personal preference, budget and *you get what you pay for*.

SHOPPING FOR DRUMS

Advice Tidbit #1 — A Drum is a Drum

Understand and accept that a drum, is a drum, is a drum. A lot of so-called experts would lose their minds over this statement. One, because many of them think that their drums are the best. Two, because many drummers have never played anything but expensive drums. Three, because some drummers have never dabbled in reconditioning old or inexpensive drums. Four, because all of the drum manufacturers tell them otherwise in their quest to sell their brand.

Advice Tidbit #2 — Say Whatever?

Understand that drum manufacturers will say anything to dig their marketing hooks into you and make you buy *their* drums. That doesn't mean that they are giving you the best advice, or even correct advice and information.

For example, I've see drum manufacturers market "*Steam-bent Solid Drum Shells*," trying to capitalize on the solid seamess shell selling point. However, it's either "Steam-bent" or "Solid." You can't have both. Steam bending takes a single piece of wood, applies hot steam to the wood that creates a sufficient amount of moisture that allows you to then bend that piece of wood around a form. But wait a minute, what about that pesky seam? There is a single seam with Steam-bent shells (usually a scarf joint). No matter how you HIDE that seam, it's still there. The only way to get a true "Solid" shell is if it is hewn from a log. That's right . . . take a log, chop off a section, then gut the interior, leaving a SOLID continuous shell with no seam. Heck, drums made out of plies are closer to a "solid" shell than steam-bent, because all of the individual plies overlap the previous plies' seams.

Advice Tidbit #3 — Budget Conscious

Set a realistic price range for yourself. There's no need to over-extend your budget with the thought that more expensive drums will sound better. Don't put yourself in debt for a drum kit. New or used, don't worry about how they sound before you take possession. Don't even worry if you haven't even heard it (such as buying online). You can make whatever drum kit you buy look and sound killer! If you have any doubts, please see my tutorials on *Refinishing*, *Wrapping* and *Soundcracking* drums.



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Advice Tidbit #4 — New Drums

Do your own research. As I mentioned before, putting a question out there to other drummers asking them *what you should buy* is useless, unproductive and may even lead you to purchase drums that you are not happy with in the end.

If you want to see and hear particular drum brands in action, get on YouTube and search for them. For example, search “*Pearl Masterworks Drums*,” “*Tama Imperialstar Drums*,” “*Sonor AQ1 Drums*,” etc. But try and find videos where the kit is not all individually mic’d. In other words, videos where they just have 1 or 2 room mics. A very good YouTube Channel for this is “*Drumcenter cz*”. When videos have the entire kit close-mic’d you can be sure they are providing you with the best quality mix that they can, which as I have mentioned many time on my site and in my videos, is totally different than the actual ambient sound of drums.

Also, check out all the drum company websites. Look everything over. On most of their websites you will be able to hear all of their different lines of drums. You will be able to see what their drums look like. However, keep in mind what I stated earlier . . . drum manufacturers will say anything to lure you in to buying their brand. So, put less stock in what you read than what you see and hear, because all drum manufacturers will spin a compelling tale as to why their drums should end up in your home. So, shop with your eyes. Find a kit that excites you visually. Dialing in the sound that you want will happen with any drums, so find the kit that stimulates your eyes.

Advice Tidbit #5 — Used Drums

When buying used drums you definitely want to see them in person before buying them if at all possible. I’ve heard good, bad and horrible stories of purchasing drums off of eBay, so buyer beware if you choose to buy sight-unseen. It’s easy to make drums look good in a photo. Take the photo(s) from only the best angle(s), Photoshop, etc. Not only that, but there are things that you should examine in person, up close and personal. If you do decide to purchase online, just be sure that there are plenty of photos, or better yet a video. And ask the seller questions if you are unsure about something.

Things to check for with used drums: are any of the threads damaged or stripped where the tension (tuning) rods screw into the lugs., cracks in the shell(s), cracked or bent hoops, any mold or mildew on the shells, damaged bearing edges, etc. Don’t worry about the heads, 95% chance you’ll be replacing those, if not right away, soon.

Again, as long as things are structurally sound, don’t work about the finish/color. That’s an easy fix as you can see if you check out my tutorials on **Refinishing** and **Wrapping** drums. And don’t be concerned with the sound, because chances are it/they will sound like shit. That’s also an easy fix if you check out my tutorial on **Soundcrafting** drums.



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Advice Tidbit #6 — Be Patient

Once you have made your decision and have your drums in your possession, the first thing to keep in mind is that you most likely will not be happy with the sound right out of the box. If you are then congratulations, you will have experienced something that I never have in 40+ years!

Stock heads that come on new drums are average at best. Heads on used drums are probably old or worn beyond decent functionality regarding sound quality. And heads are only a part of the equation when it comes to zeroing in on a killer sound for your kit. But all of that is the topic of an entirely different discussion. Please see my tutorial on **Soundcrafting** drums.

SHOPPING FOR STANDS & HARDWARE

Advice Tidbit #1 — You Get What You Pay For

Stands and hardware are a different animal than drums. As long as a drum is structurally in good shape, it can be made to sound great. With stands and hardware it comes down to two things: 1.) Conditions of use. 2.) Quality of components and manufacturing. How those two things will coexist is the determining factor on what to purchase.



I'll start out by saying that if you will be touring, gigging on a regular basis, frequently setting up and tearing down for rehearsals, etc., then I definitely recommend good quality to top-of-the-line stands and hardware. And when I say stands and hardware I mean cymbal stands, cymbal boom arm add-ons, hi-hat stand, tom stands & mounts, tom arms, attachment clamps for adding cymbal arms or percussion items, throne, kick drum pedal(s), etc. Anything besides drums, heads, cymbals and sticks.

If your kit will be static, let's say, in a home, studio, etc. and will not be subject to the rigors of the road, regular gigging, etc., then inexpensive, even non-brand name, stands and hardware can be fine. I have a beautiful kit in my current home studio. My five cymbal stands were \$33 each on Amazon (my other cymbals and my X-hat are mounted on clamp attachments to those stands). Those stands look beautiful. To look at them you can't tell them from apart from any big name brand. Upon close examination, an experienced drummer would be able to tell that they wouldn't last three months on the road. The wing nut assemblies, tilter mechanisms, tube wall thickness, etc., would not hold up to constant abuse. But, for a static environment like mine, there's no need for \$120 - \$160 stands.

As for a throne and kick drum pedal(s) I'll say this. You definitely want a comfortable, sturdy throne. Don't skimp when it comes to that, it's not worth it. Regarding kick drum pedals, I want to take that discussion to it's own tidbit.



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Advice Tidbit #2 — It's Not the Pedal

Kick drum pedals can become a heated debate in the blink of an eye among drumming forums and social media posts. I blame this on three things: 1.) Manufacturer marketing. 2.) Pro drummer endorsements. 3.) Ignorant drummers.



Before I discuss those three topics, let me just say this — a talented, accomplished, or pro drummer can play just as well on any kick drum pedal. It's never about the pedal, it's about the player. There's no magic pedal that will substitute for technique and ability. And yes, different pedals do have different feels, so you should find one that is comfortable for you. However, comfort does not equate to talent and ability. It's all as simple as that.

Manufacturer marketing - as with drums, and anything else that drum makers sell, pedals are no different. They will paint a masterpiece of speed, fluidity and performance beyond what some drummer's feet/ankles/legs are physically capable of. Other than quality craftsmanship, it's the player that makes the pedal, not the other way around.

Pro drummer endorsements - as I just mentioned, a pro drummer can play just as well on any pedal. They are being *compensated* for **anything** that they say regarding the pedal that they endorse. And just because a particular pedal may be *comfortable* for them, does not mean that pedal would be the most comfortable for you.

Ignorant drummers - as with any type of forum or social media discussion, whether it be drum gear or politics, some folks are just ignorant. A humble, educated, experience drummer like myself will pretty much say what I am telling you (outside of their endorsement script!). Pay not attention to the drummers tell you that this or that pedal is the best, the fastest, the smoothest, etc. Pay no attention to the arguing on the subject. If a drummer says that a particular pedal makes them play faster, then that drummer has no idea what they are talking about. It's the drummer's ability first, comfort of the pedal second. Does comfort play a part? Absolutely. But it's on an individual basis. Just like running shoes . . . is comfort important? Yes. Is one particular running shoe comfortable to every runner? No. Do they make you run faster? No.

The bottom line is this, unless you are an accomplished drummer that has played numerous pedals, you should try out pedals before you buy. Me, I am comfortable enough to see and read about a pedal online and buy it. I did that with my current Pearl double pedal. But I have been playing for over 50 years and have played a dozen different brands of pedal over the years.

SHOPPING FOR CYMBALS

Advice Tidbit #1 — Variety overload vs “That’s the One!”

The first thing that I can say about cymbals is that they vary more than any other component of a drum kit. For example, if you are listening to samples of different drum kits or snare drums, after a



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while it's hard to really distinguish between one or the other on any definitely noticeable level that would make you overwhelmingly choose one over the other. Not so much when it comes to cymbals. The sounds, nuances and features from one cymbal to the other, and one manufacturer to another, is formidable. In a nutshell . . . there's a **LOT** to choose from!



The sounds, nuances and features from one cymbal to the other, and one manufacturer to the other, is formidable. In a nutshell . . . there's a **LOT** to choose from! It can be overwhelming. However, there is one good thing. When you hear a cymbal that you love, there's no questioning, wondering, or denying it. It's almost like getting slapped in the forehead when you hear it.

Advice Tidbit #2 — Listen, Listen, Listen

The other nice thing about cymbals, is that you can literally listen to them online and get accurate representations of their sounds. YouTube is a mecca for sampling cymbals. The same goes for cymbal manufacturer websites. Unlike drums, there's very little processing that goes into recorded cymbals. Hit-hat and ride mics, and overhead mics for crash and effect cymbals are excellent at capturing a cymbal's sound. So, by all means, get on YouTube and spend time listening to comparisons between hi-hats, rides, crashes, effect cymbals, and how they all interact together as well. There are a ton of such videos. Again, just search terms on YouTube like, "Hi-hat cymbals compared," "Crash cymbals compared," etc.

SHOPPING FOR DRUM HEADS

Advice Tidbit — The Only Tidbit

After playing drums for 50+ years and diligently experimenting with heads for 30+ years, I'm still learning and experimenting with drum heads. Just when I think I've finally found the perfect head combination, I experiment again and find the next perfect blend.





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As far as drum heads are concerned, there are three major manufacturers that make up 99% of the drum head industry — Remo, Evans and Aquarian. And the selection is overwhelming. You could spend a small fortune trying all of the different heads and combinations (batter & resonant), and I have over the years.

Next to sticks and pedals, I would say that heads are probably the most personal of gear selection when it comes to playing the drums. So, since my goal has been to **not** recommend any particular drum gear, I would never think of starting now with drum heads.

The other difficult part of buying drum heads and finding what you like best is that it's next to impossible to try out heads anywhere. Certainly not any variety of heads anyway. You might have a few at a music store or drum shop that you can hear, but I've never seen an outlet that carries half of the drum heads available, let alone all of them. And since it really is trial and error, you are then at the mercy of reading about them on the manufacturer's websites, picking one, and trying it.

So, again, get on YouTube and listen to head comparisons. There are a bunch of videos that compare kick drum heads, snare heads and tom heads. Find the sounds that you like most, and then give those heads a try as a starting point. I cover heads and sound in more depth in my **Soundcrafting** drums tutorial.

SHOPPING FOR DRUMSTICKS

Advice Tidbit #1 — The Basics

Finding a stick can be daunting if you are new to drumming. And even if you have been drumming for a while, chances are that you stuck with one of the first 2 or 3 sticks that you tried when starting out. So, it might surprise you to know that there are over 185 different styles of sticks that come from over 55 known manufacturers in their standard versions, and then dozens of artist *signature* models as well. So let's just stick to the basics for now.



Drumsticks are classified by numbers and letters. The lower the number, the heavier the stick. The most common numbers are 2, 5, 7 (although there are others). So with those number, 2 is the lightest and 7 is the heaviest. The letters are most commonly A and B (although there are others, as well as words, such as *Rock*, *Classic*, etc.) and they represent the thickness (diameter), with B being thicker than A. So, my beginner suggestion would be to go to a music instrument outlet and try those out and see which feels best. Then over time you can experiment with other sticks. I have used a 5B most of my life.



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Advice Tidbit #2 — The Nitty Gritty

So, my beginning suggestion would be that it's all about what YOU find comfortable. Don't base your decision on the type, size, weight, wood type, or manufacturer that others say are their favorite, because we are all different in what we like and dislike. YOU need to find what feels best to YOU as far as texture, weight and dimension. If you can go to a music instrument outlet or drum shop, you can and try those most common variations out and see which feels best. They'll even have "test" sticks that you can try on a practice pad until you find the ones that feel most pleasing to you. Then over time you can experiment with other sticks if you want, but at least you will have developed a sound foundational starting point as far as your basic preference.

Manufacturers are pretty precise when it comes to weights, sizes and quality nowadays. However, if you have a local outlet for buying sticks it's good to give them a roll on a flat even surface to make sure they haven't warped in transit, in storage due to humidity or other variables that affect wood. Most music stores or drum shops have a glass countertop that you can roll them on. However, a good outlet will check their sticks on a regular basis and weed out any warped sticks. It's also a good idea to give a quick inspection for hairline cracks, as well as checking the bead (tip) for inconsistencies, chips, shape deformities, etc.

Once in a while you'll hear a manufacturer say that you shouldn't mix and match pairs, because each "pair" is perfectly matched weight-wise. I'm here to tell you that's nothing more than a tactic to sell more sticks (and I know this from an inside manufacturer source). No different than many food & beverage expiration dates are put there to make you throw out what you have left and buy more, when in fact the majority of food and beverages would be just fine well past the expiration date with no loss of quality and cause no health problem. I get my sticks from the manufacturer by the box full, 25-50 pairs at a time or more (as do other professional drummers). They are not "matched as a pair" and we don't use them that way. We grab them by the hand full and toss them in our stick bags. And when we drop or break a stick as we are playing, we just grab the first random stick from our bag that we get ahold of. Regardless, sticks nowadays are manufactured on precise computer-controlled machinery that measure every aspect of the stick to provide the best quality control possible. And if there should still be a slight variation from one stick to the other, it's not enough to affect one's playing ability.

I will say that I have been ordering mine online for years now and there's only been a few times where I experienced a warped stick, so it's not as big of an issue as it was years ago.

IN CONCLUSION

Take your time, do your research, and if you have any questions, feel free to shoot me an email.

