



Craviotto Unlimited Edition Snare Drum

What's In A Name?

by Paul Bielewicz

KEY NOTES

- exceptional volume and projection
- versatile and responsive
- 10-lug design allows great tuning range
- cast lugs don't reflect same appeal as other high-end components
- limited size offerings

The name "Craviotto" has come to be synonymous with high-end, solid-shell snare drums created by one of the foremost drum makers in the world. With this reputation for quality, limited offerings, and one-of-a-kind hand-craftsmanship, the Craviotto name has not previously conjured up images of affordability. However, at the 2005 NAMM show master drum maker Johnny Craviotto introduced the Unlimited Edition solid-shell maple snare model. In a nutshell, it's a more "production-oriented" drum, intended for the mid-range price market.

Since Unlimited models are built using a steam-bent single-ply maple shell, they offer the tonal characteristics one might expect from much pricier drums. But by offering a limited range of sizes and options, Craviotto has managed to keep production costs lower. Those savings are reflected in the price of the drum.

Unlimited series drums are offered only in 14" diameters, and only in 5½" or 6½" depths. We were sent a 6½"-deep model for this review. The single-ply maple shell is complemented with reinforcing hoops. The ten cast lugs feature a diamond shape that echoes the Craviotto logo. The drum is finished off with a high-end Trick GS007 aluminum throw-off and 20-strand snare wires.

The drums are shipped pre-tuned, and come in high-quality cordura drum bags. In addition to the bag, each Unlimited Edition snare ships with a tuning key, sticks, and your first replacement head. A nice touch.



Construction And Finish

As one might expect from Craviotto, the construction and finish on our review drum was outstanding. The maple grain showed nicely through the hand-rubbed satin oil finish. The satin oil lends just enough luster to bring out the grain of the wood, but not so much as to reduce the resonance of the drum the way some heavy, high-gloss finishes can do.

The cast lugs are a bit gaudy for my taste, and don't seem quite as classy as the other component fittings on the drums. But they correspond to the Craviotto diamond-shaped logo, and they suit the overall look adequately. The presence of ten lugs (as opposed to eight on many lower-end models) not only allowed us to tune the drum higher without fear of damaging the integrity of the shell, but also helped the drum keep its tone without getting "muddy" when tuned to lower tension levels.

The reinforcing hoops are also crafted of a single ply of maple, bent and formed around the interior of the drum at the top and bottom. Reinforcing hoops add strength, as the name suggests. But they also raise the pitch of the drum slightly, promote stick attack, and serve to increase volume and projection.

Sound Characteristics

In its as-shipped, pre-tuned state of medium tension (batter and snare side), the volume and projection of the Unlimited Edition snare was readily apparent. A hit in the middle of the batter head was crisp, dry, and articulate. The sound was very "woody," with a nice overtone and a lot of body. As we progressed from the middle of the batter head towards the outside edge, the overtone became more and more apparent.

As we reached the outside edge, the original overtone was complemented by a higher-pitched overtone approximately an octave above the original. The two harmonized to form a great ring-out tone. The "hang-time" of this ring-out (time from hit to silence) is longest with the drum tuned to a medium tension: almost six seconds with a hit towards the edge of the drum, about five seconds a few inches nearer the center, and about four and a half seconds at the center of the batter head.

The 10-lug design allows the drum to be tuned quite low before the center of the batter head starts to get loose and muddy. At a low tension (just tight enough to smooth out the ripples) the drum was incredibly sensitive, with excellent snare



The Craviotto "diamond" lug is designed to match the company's logo badge.



The Unlimited Edition snare drum is fitted with the Trick machined-aluminum GS007 throw-off.

response. The volume and projection were just as apparent at this tuning as with others. But the "woody" flavor of the body wasn't exhibited. What was left was a very "rat-a-tat-tat" staccato snare sound, with a significantly reduced hang-time. But with the snares turned off, the drum could sound just as big as a low rack tom.

As we increased batter head tension to a medium-high point, some of the ring-out hang time was lost. Hang times ranged from about four seconds in the middle to about two seconds towards the edge. However, an increased level of snare sensitivity and response compensated for this sacrifice. Barely a feather's touch of the stick to the head made the 20-strand snares sing. The bi-octave overtone discussed above existed at this tension level also. But the higher-pitched tone was more apparent—especially when the drum was struck in the area halfway between the center of the batter head and the edge.

At a high tension the snare exhibited qualities one might expect from a piccolo. Again, the 10-lug design allowed us to tune quite high, because the tension was more evenly distributed around the circumference

of the shell than it would've been with fewer lugs. A hit in the middle of the head produced a very bright and articulate sound, with almost no overtone. Overtones at the halfway point and the edge were moderate at best, but the sensitivity was still present. Ring-out times ranged from about two seconds in the middle to about three seconds at the edge.

Overall Impressions

Craviotto Unlimited Edition drums are very responsive, exhibit lots of overtones, and are very loud. The Trick machined aluminum throw-off operates smoothly and quietly, the 20-strand snares are responsive, and the 10-lug design allows great versatility of tuning.

These drums offer articulation and sensitivity that's very competitive with that of mid-priced multi-ply drums. Meanwhile, their single-shell construction offers a level of volume and sustain not often found at *any* price range.

THE NUMBERS

5½ and 6½x14\$995

Price includes cordura drum bag, drumkey, drumsticks, and spare drumhead.

(831) 763-0855, www.craviottodrums.com.