

Animal

Custom Elite Kit

£1,594 | The newest addition to the revived trend of British custom drum-making. **Geoff Nicholls** unleashes the Animal...

ESSENTIALS



PRICES

Elite series four-piece review kit in sparkle wrap **£1,249**
 Review kit with snare **£1,594**
 Artworks snare **£345**
 Three-piece MR shell packs **From £749**
 Three-piece Elite shell packs **From £850**

CONTACT

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The hardware is currently bought in, but Animal drum-maker Carl Gavins has plans to make his own.

Yorkshire drummer Carl 'Animal' Gavins' drum-making experience began when he made a snare drum as an A-level school project 11 years ago. He's made drums on and off since then, but has only traded as Animal Custom Drums over the past year. Carl's aim is to offer a complete, flexible custom drum making service. He doesn't tackle the metalwork yet – all the hardware on the review kit is generic bought-in Taiwanese-made stuff. But he does offer a bespoke shell-making service – he's had custom steel moulds made for every size of drum, from 6" through to 26".

Carl has a technical background in civil engineering. "I made some drawings and had moulds made up in wood by a local firm. I'm upgrading them all now, in steel. It's a slow, expensive process – a 10" mould costs £600." As Carl sees it, to be a true custom company that can provide anything the customer wants, he must have everything under his own control. Another advantage of having all the shell-making gear is that Animal can also make bare shells for hobbyists who want to try their hand at finishing, fittings, etc.

Layering up

The Animal shell production method is similar to the Yamaha Air Seal system.

Plyies of top grade birch are layered up and glued, one by one, inside the mould. The plyies are so thin there's no need to wet them or use heat for bending or bonding. An air bag is put inside the mould and you crank up the pressure then leave it until the shell is set. The process requires very fine measuring and cutting to get the plyies to butt up tight for perfect seams.

Removing the resonant head from a tom and taking a peep inside, it was some while before I could actually find the join – the seam was all but invisible. Carl's measuring skills seem at least as good as any commercial manufacturer's. The inner ply is laid vertically and sealed using tung oil, which leaves a pleasant aroma and subtle grain. The bearing edges are cut on a routing table and these also looked good. The snare has a proper, deep snare bed. The shells are straight-sided, with no inner obstacles, although if you want reinforcing rings, Animal can supply them. ▶



KEY FEATURES



MORE MOULDS, MORE CHOICE

Because Animal has all the moulds, you can pick any depth to go with your chosen diameter, with no change in price.

The toms have a dark, controlled sound, thanks to their relatively thin birch shells and the supplied Remo Pinstripe batter heads.

The superb shells are made from eight plies of top grade birch, layered one on top of the other.

The sound of the snare is very satisfying: fat and crisp with added depth.



FLASHY FINISHES

The elite is finished in classic Red Sparkle wrap, but a multitude of wraps, paints, lacquers and sparkles are available.



HARDWARE? TAKE YOUR PICK

The drums come with the hardware of your choice. Pick from chrome, brass or smoky black nickel plate as shown here.



TURN UP THE HEAT

This flame-covered Artworks snare is a great example of the more adventurous custom finishes Animal will undertake.

Animal has the moulds to make shells of any reasonable size, depth or thickness.

Custom Elite

Animal makes two levels of kit, the Elite and Mid Range (MR). You save about 25 percent on the MR series. Both series have shells made from the same birch ply, the difference being that the Elite range offers a broader choice of hardware and finishes than the MR. As well as wraps, you can choose from sparkle paints, stains and lacquers with the Elite drums.

The review kit is from the Elite series with a red sparkle wrap accompanied by an Artworks snare drum. Sizes are 12"x8", 14"x12" and 16"x14" toms, 22"x18" kick and 14"x7" snare. Toms come with RIMS-style mounts as standard on both Elite and MR series. All the drums in this particular kit have the same eight-ply, 6mm birch shells. The relatively thin birch, combined with the supplied Pinstripe batters, gave all the toms a typically dark and controlled birch sound. There's plenty of attack, good volume and a wide tuning range.

Animal usually makes the bass drums and snares with slightly thicker 10-ply shells. But I liked the thin shell bass drum as it gave more depth and darkness of tone. Just remember that Animal has the moulds to make shells of any reasonable size, depth or thickness that takes your fancy.

Flamin' fantastic

The 14"x7" snare has the same birch shell as the other drums, but it's finished in Autumn Flame, a sparkling orange and yellow paint and lacquer design. Animal can undertake custom artwork and will work from drawings for an added fee. The Artworks snare will cost you an extra £345.

I was mightily impressed by this snare. Not by its garish finish, but because it sounded great: so great I

happily played it live on two consecutive nights. I've reviewed some top dollar wood snares in recent months and all had thick-ish shells, which is the trend for snares today: a thicker shell raises the fundamental pitch. But this Artworks snare has the same thin 6mm shell as the rest of the kit and the effect of this, as with the bass drum, is a deeper, more complex tone, accentuated by the extra depth of 7". I loved it – fat yet crisp, with a satisfyingly dense, snare crunch. Incidentally, because the drums are custom made you can also specify the number and size of vent holes you want and, if you prefer, you can have tube lugs, as on the review snare.

Black nickel

The metal fittings on the kit all come from generic Taiwanese sources. You may well have seen many of these components before. While this detracts slightly from the exclusivity of the kit it does keep prices down. The review kit still looked tasty with its smoky black nickel plated rims and lightweight cube lugs. You can choose normal chrome, brass or black nickel plate and you can specify any fittings, snare strainers, etc, subject to availability and price adjustment. The standard of generic fittings is high nowadays and everything fitted to the review drums is of professional quality.

Obviously the hardware is what stops Animal from being a totally unique brand, although it is quite usual for small companies to rely on generic stock. However, Carl is nothing if not ambitious and he's planning on designing all his own hardware. He's currently working on a new style of tom mount. Just don't hold your breath for the immediate future. **R**

RHYTHM VERDICT

It's great to see the steady emergence of a handful of really good British custom drum manufacturers. What distinguishes Animal from the rest is the investment Carl Gavins is making in a full range of proper steel moulds. This is his strongest asset and enables him to supply custom, hand made shells in any size and finish, at reasonable prices. It will be some while before Animal can extend this exclusivity to the hardware, but the drums still look and sound very impressive.

+ Complete range of custom-made high quality birch shells from a British craftsman.

- Generic hardware detracts slightly from the custom label and exclusivity of the drums.

RATING

