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MARCH 2008



HEAD TO HEAD

TALKING SKIN STRATEGY WITH THE PROS

BY ANDREW LENTZ

Drumheads aren't the sexiest part of a drum kit, but they might be the most important. Think about it. Without the right pair, a drum shell is rendered little more than a very pretty, albeit expensive tube. And like a drum shell, every drummer requires just the right heads to realize his or her signature sound. Keeping in mind that the potential head combinations are almost infinite, we talked to skinsmen across generations and styles to get their take on everything from the selection process down to tuning techniques to get the sound they want. Like snowflakes, no two drummers are ever alike.

Jim Riley

BAND Rascal Flatts

HEADS Remo

CURRENT SETUP 8 years

In a town like Nashville where session drummers are a dime a dozen, Jim Riley has to bring his A game every day, whether he's recording with Rascal Flatts or teaching drum lessons from home on his days off. Could it be that drumhead expertise sets him apart from other country drummers? Nah, but we thought we'd pick his brains anyway.

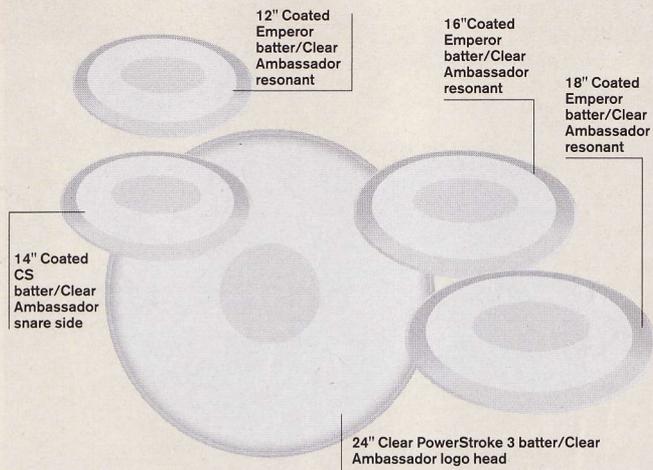
HEAD CHANGE FREQUENCY? Snare roughly every three weeks, bass drum once a month, and tom heads roughly every four shows. "After that point I've beaten them so bad that they will not tune as low as I like them."

EVER CHANGE 'EM? Once a month when on the road. "Believe it or not, bottom heads take quite a beating. When you hit the batter head, it sends a column of air straight at the bottom head. The bottom head will flex and bubble out" he explains. "Let me tell you, if you want to bring the sound of your kit back to life change the bottom heads. Your drums will sing."

STUDIO SETUP VS. LIVE. "On the road, durability is a factor and I tend to bash out there. Also we are looking for a sound that will project. In the studio I like to get a much warmer sound," which means coated Ambassadors on the toms and snare (clears on the resonant side), and a PowerStroke 3 on the bass sans Falam Slam patch. "The patch tends to rob you of low end in the studio. I love the sound of a felt beater."

DAMN STRAIGHT, BOTTOM HEADS MATTER. "I'm very particular about the bottom heads that I use. I'm *not* a fan of thin bottom heads. People's reasoning for buying them is usually that they think they will ring longer. I feel like they give the drum a very brittle tone."

WIDE-OPEN TUNING. Riley's philosophy is that natural ring and subsequent decay may sound big when isolated but once it's thrown into the mix it gets swallowed up by the guitars and other instruments. "If you tune a tom to go



'thud' then it will sound even shorter in the mix. The bass drum for me is a different story. I tend to use either home bedroom pillows or one of the blankets that my aunt knitted for me."

ARE BEARING EDGES A FACTOR? "Absolutely. Most of my drums are modern-era Ludwig Classics with no reinforcing hoops and a sharp 45-degree

angle bearing edge. They have very little contact with the head, so the head rings longer. This means I can use a 2-ply head and still get the drum to ring."

BIZARRE TUNINGS. "For a bonus track on the Flatts' last album, we taped about three sheets of paper to the top head of the snare and toms. It sounded great!"

