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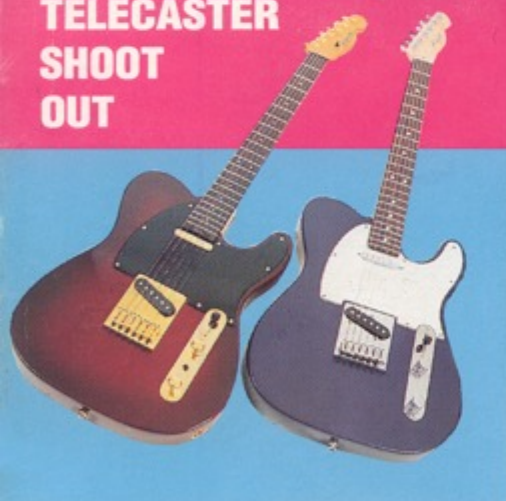
The  
**Guitar**  
Magazine

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# SONOR SIGNATURE SERIES ●

RRP: £2,883

**"Each drum is made from 12 plies of Beech."**

**T**HE SONOR 'Signature Series' sets were introduced at the Frankfurt show in 1980 and on Boxing Day 1979 I found myself winging out to Germany to be the first to see the brand-new set and write about it. I remember we hadn't had any snow to speak of here at the time, but the Germans certainly had.

Weather conditions and the set itself made the trip to the Sonor factory pretty memorable. So, since it's exactly 10 years since I first saw what was really the forerunner of the world's ultra-expensive sets, I felt it was about time I took another look at it (*I don't want you to think I've been ignoring the Signature stuff over the past decade. I've checked it out at each trade show, but with so much other Sonor product to look at each year it hasn't exactly been a priority.*)

Anyway the 'Signature Series' is so called because each drum is signed by Horst Link whose family have owned the Sonor company since it began in Germany in 1875. What's different about Signature is that every single drum shell is made from 12 plies of Beech (*which they used to call 'Heavy' when they also offered a Birch set designated 'Lite'*). The shells are 12mm thick and made from four, three-ply cross-grained sandwiches of beech which are staggered and joined at an angle inside an oil-heated former. Sonor subsequently apply a layer of an exotic wood to the insides and outsides of the Beech to give an even more colourful and distinctive sound and this can either be an African wood called Bubinga, or an Indonesian one known as Makassar Ebony, (*this operation is carried out so skillfully and the wood is so grainy that it's difficult to see these joins which are cut together at right angles to the bearing edge*). I wrote last time that Sonor bought a complete Bubinga

tree so they could have enough wood to make Signature. I wonder if they've had to buy another one yet?

Signature's shells are made deliberately undersize, so there's no chance of contact between them and the rim of the head, and have beautiful bearing edges set at the usual 45% but with a small radius on their very outer most plies.

## The Bass Drum

Sonor make four different sized 'Signature Series' bass drums: 18 x

without cutting into them. These hoops are made from beech plies and covered in a veneer of wood to match the rest of the drums. Sonor thoughtfully fit them with a piece of rubber so their good work won't be ruined by the jaws of the bass pedal.

The spurs themselves are pretty much the same as on the original although the retaining blocks have certainly changed. Anyway the spurs are constructed from triangles of thick rod which face forward with optional rubber, or spike tipped ends. They're held in the

'Signature' bass drums are unusual in 1990 in that they have an adjustable internal damper just like they had in the late fifties and early sixties. A single 'T-screw' outside the shell is threaded into a hinged bracket to which are joined a couple of stripes of sheepskin which extend all the way down the head where they're fixed to an identical hinged bracket at the bottom. Since top and bottom brackets are linked via a piece of rod, as the 'T-screw' is turned clockwise they and the strips attached to them are moved against the drum in a sort of parallel-action. It's an impressive mechanism which really works.

The front head doesn't have an adjustable damper, just a strip of felt to filter out the overtones.

## The Toms

The three Signature toms I saw measured 12 x 12", 13 x 13" and 15 x 17", so there's nothing

normal about them at all. The two smallest come with six of the usual nutboxes and screwdriver tensioners per head while the floor tom has eight. All three drums are fitted with Sonor's seamless ferro-manganese hoops which have triple flanges, are thicker than most and a great deal better. Otherwise there's nothing else on, or in the smaller drums at all except for the tom holder receiver block which is simply a smaller version of the one on the bass complete with a 'T-screw' and integral cast, tube support piece.

The floor tom is a pretty unusual size and for me reminiscent of old-fashioned drums. I commented on this before but I have to admit that even though it looks wrong, it certainly sounds right! Like the other toms it has a small airhole and unlike them it has cast blocks for its three extra-thick bent legs which have a memory clamp and like the spurs have optional rubber, or spike-tipped ends. These two-



**This Sonor doesn't just makes 'beep' noises?**

16, 20 x 17, 22 x 18 and 24 x 18. I tested the 20 which seems to be a size which has become fashionable and very much in demand again. Like all good drums with this diameter, Sonor's has a total of 16 tensioners although only 14 of them have 'T-handles'; the pair on the floor at the back nearest to the pedal are ordinary slotted tension screws. All of Sonor's nutboxes are springless and sort of wedge or chisel-shaped with decorative lines cast into them and a rather unique, yet simple method of maintaining head tension. Invariably the very act of striking the drum helps to detune it, since the vibrations loosen the tensioners. So, Sonor's screws have flats on them and the swivel nuts all have a slot cut in them to retain the flat side of a 'D-shaped' ring of springy steel. This exerts pressure on the flat of the screw and locks it. The claws are pressed from steel with a specially rounded gripper edge which keeps the rounded end of the plywood hoops in place

jaws of a two-piece cast block which has a single 'L-shaped' screw to lock them solid. Since the triangle is curved, you simply press it towards the shell to pack it away. Like all the metal-ware attached to the shell, these holder blocks are mounted on what I'm told are carbon-fibre plinths to stop them cutting into the surface of the wood immediately below them.

In the very middle of the drum is the tom holder receiver block which isn't quite the original, but the same one they've fitted to their sets for a while. From the top it's a large cast rectangular plinth with an indentation around its centre hole for the cast memory clamp and a single 'T-screw'. However below it and inside the drum is a thoughtful cast tube-retaining section which supports the down tube of the double holder. The aforementioned 'T-screw' doesn't press directly on to the down tube, instead there's a piece of nylon in the way which takes the strain.

piece blocks are up to Sonor's usual standard with prism jaws and a single 'T-screw' to hold the stubby legs in the right position.

The two smallest drums actually have two of the 'Signature Series' rectangular badges which are bolted to the shell and rest on top of a piece of carbon fibre. There're no prizes for knowing why they have two but, in case you really don't know, they're situated so the drums can be mounted to the left or right of a stand and still have an identifying badge in view.

## The Snare Drum

You can buy Signature snare drums in three different materials and two different depths. I saw the latest shallow cast bronze drum which has a 4" shell, but they also make 8" deep drums with steel, beech, or cast bronze shells. Those 8" deep bronze shells look like cannons when they come out of the mould, and, even when they've been machined down to a little less than 1/42, still weigh 32 pounds complete with hardware! The thinner drum doesn't weigh anything like that since it doesn't have the same nutboxes or a parallel-action snare mechanism. But it's still pretty damn heavy because it sports the same die-cast hoops. The inside of the shell is actually turned more in the centre than at the outside to create a thicker bearing edge, which actually looks like a metal glue ring! As far as one can see the edges are slightly rounded on the top, with a couple of very shallow and wide chamfers below to rebate the snares. The nutboxes are exceedingly small and consist of a pair of posts (which are threaded through the side at right angles to take the normal Sonor tension screws) and mounted side by side on a plate. Ten slotted tensioners are fitted, but otherwise there are no springs or 'D-clips' to maintain tension on the head. The snare mechanism is the same as fitted to the phonic shallow drum which has the same dimensions

though its shell is made from ferro-manganese steel. It's really well made from machined parts with a turned lever, which moves in a semi-circle to pull the snares up, a fine tuning knob and screw operated jaws to grip the cord attached to the normal length 24 strand snares. The butt end is also adjustable via a small turned knob; it's hinged and also has screwed jaws for the cord. Absolutely all the metal parts are copper plated to match the shell and give the drum a luxurious look.

## The Heads

Sonor make their own high quality heads these days and fit them their Signature sets. The batters all had XP's (which stands for *Extra Power*) which are double-ply heads fixed at the collar while the bottoms had single-ply medium clears. There's no hole in the bass drum front head, it's simply a black version of those see-throughs and also medium gauge. As with most snare drums Signature's was fitted with a regular white-coated single-ply head in Sonor's medium weight, although if you specified, you could doubt get it with slightly thinner model.

## The Sounds

I went back to my original Signature review and found that I'd written: "The drum sounds themselves are exceptionally clear and round with lots of depth. The bass drum is easily the loudest I have ever heard. Nothing has changed and they still sound exactly like that. They only additional word I could use 10 years after is ballsy. The snare drum has an amazing crack to it, you know the one which makes you blink every time you hit it. It's got a certain amount of depth but let's face it, it's meant to cut through (I understand a great many of Sonor's endorsees have one).

I have long felt that these

Signature drums were better suited to heavier hitters, although not necessarily rockers, simply because they 'sing' better when played with force and conviction. Of course they respond well at low volume too, but for me their colours become more obvious at volume.

I wonder if we'll see regular-sized Signature drums in the near future since along with 5" deep snare drums, 12 x 8", 13 x 9", 14 x 10" and so on are now much in demand. For me these Sonor drums will sound even better if they're a little shallower. I also feel they're crying out to be fitted with the RIMS system.

I said in 1980 "this set must be the Rolls-Royce of production drums and is not going to come cheaply, but no doubt the guy who buys this quality set will be well aware of what he wants and presumably happy to pay for it".

For me nothing has changed in the past decade, it's still the Rolls Royce of production drums, still expensive, still aimed at the discerning drummer, they still look great and I've never seen a used one advertised for sale. Here's to the next 10 years of 'Signature Series'!

Bob Henrit

### AT A GLANCE

**CONSTRUCTION:** 12 plies of Beech 12mms thick

**BASS DRUM:** 18x16", 20x17", 22x18" and 24x18"

Springless nutboxes

**TOMS:** 12x12", 13x13", 15x17"

Seamless Ferro-Manganese hoops

**SNARE DRUM:** Bronze 4" shell, Steel 8" shell, small nutboxes, 10 slotted tensioners

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