

A DIFFERENT TYPE
OF DARKNESS

TRX CLS Series Cymbals

By David E. Libman

As TRX enters its second decade as a purveyor of handmade Turkish B20 bronze cymbals, the company's sonic palette continues to expand. Currently, TRX's website offers more than ten lines of cymbals, spanning a sonic field from dark to bright. This year, TRX introduced the new CLS series to fill out the range of options on the darker end of the spectrum.

I received the CLS 23", 21", and 19" crash-rides; a 17" crash; 15" and 14" hi-hats; 18", 12", and 10" Thunders (crashes and splashes featuring perforated holes of various sizes); and 16" Storm Hats (featuring a top cymbal populated by six large holes).

A VERY FAMILIAR FORMULA

Like all TRX's professional series, CLS models are handmade from B20 alloy. Thin and consequently not very heavy, each CLS has traditional lathing that goes from edge to center hole. Although hand-hammered, none of the CLSs have particularly deep hammer marks. Cymbal tops and bottoms receive TRX's moon and star black logos with serif-font "TRX" initials. Other text indicators include "CLS" initials in serif font on cymbal tops, and stamped size/model descriptions in sans-serif fonts on cymbal

bottoms (e.g., "23" 57 1/2 cm Crash Ride").

Each CLS is finished in a rather dull (non-brilliant) retro-gray color that has a patina-like vibe. The overall effect is that the CLS series look like well-kept older cymbals. The only earmarks of modern manufacturing techniques that the CLSs reveal are the rather large perforations that populate the Thunder and Storm models.

Quality control on the CLS review set was very consistent. Edges and holes are smooth to the touch, weight seems to be well balanced, logos are cleanly applied without streaking, and the gray color is consistent from cymbal to cymbal. As with most natural finishes, the surface tends to darken under the press of a sweaty finger, so wear cotton gloves if that's not your thing (or if you're in the witness protection program).

BIG CLEAN WASHY CRASH-RIDES

Although not a negative, to my ears, the 19", 21", and 23" crash-rides function more like crashes than rides. Stick articulation tends to get lost on faster or louder patterns due to a prevalence of wash and sustain that emanates with a lush hum. The overtones enveloped within that wall of sound sit in the lower/darker

range. Unlike those of many "dark" cymbals, the CLS crash-rides avoid sounding trashy or dead. Instead, they sound big, warm, washy, and clean — with plenty of initial attack followed by long, low simmering sustain. Bells on the crash-rides are distinct but not harsh. The bell voice includes a varied range of complementary overtones.

Back in the day, when I added rivets to cymbals, I'd go to Stan at Professional Drum Shop in Hollywood. He would expertly drill the holes and then hammer in rivets. Sorry Stan, but with these crash-rides, TRX does the work for you. Each cymbal has nine separate holes placed in groups of three at the outer diameters — all of which are sized to accommodate rivets. TRX sent two sets of its aluminum removable rivets (plain and black), which feature a threaded top part (like a screw) and a threaded receptacle. These were so easy to install that I did it without any Ikea-instructions-type meltdowns. The lightweight aluminum rivets provided a nice complement of sizzle to the ample wash already existent in these crash-rides. Aluminum naturally has a drier, controlled sonic quality, which helps to accompany the warmer sustain already present in these CLS models.

EXPLOSIVE 17" CRASH

When struck on its edge, the 17" crash begins with a rounded clank that quickly gives way to an explosion of mids and lows. This is a focused crash with ample sustain within its narrower range of low overtones, and a surprisingly clean bell. Like the crash-rides, this crash has nine rivet holes sized to accommodate TRX's removable rivets.

SOUND OF THUNDERS

CLS cymbals have a look and feel of older models from the 1960s or '70s, a time when you didn't see cymbals populated by large holes. Yet these large perforations seem to be the rage among cymbal makers these days, so the CLS includes its set of perforated plates called Thunders.

Whenever I see perforated cymbals, they look gimmicky. But I usually come around when the visual gimmick has a "sound" reason, and here, I can't argue with the result. These Thunders' sound is vastly different from normal crashes or splashes. When crashed, the 18" Thunder has an incredibly quick attack followed by an airy wash of focused mids that hint at the overtones of a China cymbal without the harshness. Ultimately, the 18" Thunder seems to bridge that aural gap between typical crashes and China-types.



TRX CLS hi-hats:
14" \$550/15" \$600



Made in Turkey

Retro-gray finish

Top and bottom cymbals on TRX CLS hi-hats
are closer in weight than most other
hi-hat top and bottom cymbals.

Hand hammering

B20 bronze

Black logos



Traditional lathing

TRX CLS Series
17" crash \$455

TRX CLS 16" Storm
hi-hats feature six holes
in the top cymbal.

TRX CLS 16"
Storm hi-hats \$700

All prices are MSRP



CONTACT
818-751-3257
trxcymbals.com

SOUNDLAB

TRX CLS Thunder cymbal:
10" \$240/12" \$290/18" \$547

Made of B20
bronze in Turkey



TRX CLS Thunder
cymbals include
holes of various sizes.



TRX CLS crash-ride comes with
nine installed rivet holes.

TRX CLS Series crash-ride:
23" \$673/21" \$600/19" \$528

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The large perforations work exceptionally well on the 12" and 10" Thunders. Each smaller Thunder explodes immediately like typical splashes. Then the sound trails like a flash of white noise that distinguishes these Thunders from the more pitchy/bell-like qualities of similarly sized normal splashes.

16" STORM BREWING

Keeping with the weather theme, TRX's CLS line includes a 16" set of hi-hats that feature a top cymbal with six large holes. With the CLS hi-hats, TRX opted to experiment with a pre-New Beat design philosophy, in which the bottom hi-hat cymbal isn't much heavier than the top. For the Storm set I received, there was only a two-ounce difference between the top and bottom cymbals.

If I'm going to play quick sticking patterns, I don't like the psychological risk that my stick tip might miss a playing surface and

go through a hole. So I opted to place the bottom (non-perforated) cymbal on top, which was no problem in terms of feel, given its similar weight.

The Storm Hats sound quite unique. With their 16" diameter and large holes, they produce about the loudest foot *chick* I've heard. Silent/suffocated *chicks* never happened because there's plenty of airflow. Open splashes with the foot hint at the sound of Chinese-type crashes — only on the cleaner side.

When played with sticks, these hats bark loudly with a metallic, sloshy sound that always seems to engage the interaction between both cymbals. To my ear, these are a set of effects hats, and not a primary set.

15" AND 14" HI-HATS

Unlike the 16" Storms, the 15" and 14" hats don't have a top cymbal with large holes. Like the Storms, the 15" and 14" hats feature a


throwback design in which bottom cymbals aren't much heavier than tops. I hesitate to give exact weights because handmade cymbals vary from set to set, but with the review set, each top and bottom cymbal weighed between two and three pounds, and bottoms weighed only four or five ounces more than tops.

Because of their lighter (and consequently spongier) bottoms, foot *chicks* on these hi-hats have a less precise sound than on many modern hats, and foot splashes carry a lot of wash. When played with sticks, fast patterns can be heard clearly, yet the lighter bottom cymbal allows for a hefty inclusion of wash into the sonic mix. This ample wash made these cymbals sound less crispy than modern hi-hats with heavier bottoms. For even more wash, each bottom cymbal comes with nine holes near the edge (again in sets of three) that are sized to

accommodate TRX's removable rivets.

Overall, these hi-hats manage to sound clear, warm, and washy. Yet they have enough vibrancy to avoid sounding old or dead.

VERDICT

There are so many cymbal choices available these days that it's sometimes hard to discern why you would choose one brand or series over another. With that in mind, the CLS cymbals seem to distinguish themselves by focusing on low to mid-low overtones with lots of wash, while avoiding the excessively trashy or dry qualities that can sometimes typify "dark" cymbals. The CLS models manage to be simultaneously warm, dark, washy, and clean sounding. All around, an impressive cymbal series, and the stars of the show for me are the 23" crash-ride, 16" Storm Hat, and 10" and 12" Thunder. 

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