

# Intensifying Sound: Trick Drums

Interview by: Sonny Burnett

In the past few years it seems that we've been hearing one drum companies name more and more, Trick Drums. Trick has actually been serving the drum and percussion industry for seventeen years now, but more recently seems to be emerging as the new rising star of the drum industry. Founded by current owner and president Mike Dorfman, Trick is really an interesting story, so we sat down with Mike for an in depth look into this groundbreaking company.

Mike like most of us fell in love with the drums at an early age, but in addition to drums he participated in auto racing and was touring the U.S.A. with professional racing teams not only as a crew member but was also for a short time the youngest pro driver on the NHRA drag racing circuit. Mike says it was his racing background and exposure to performance machined parts that was fundamental to the product designs at Trick.

**SB: Drums first, do you still play?**

MD: "For the last fourteen years I have played and recorded with a popular Chicago band called the Soul Pigs, but now running Trick is a seven day a week endeavor so my playing has been curtailed. I do have a kit set-up in the shop and I usually practice at night after everyone goes home."

**SB: How did you get the name Trick?**

MD: "Trick is motor sport slang for the latest, coolest most high performance thing, you've probably heard the expression tricked out."

**SB: What was Trick's first product?**

MD: "Trick Drum Polish. When I got out of racing and wanted to get into the drum business, there wasn't anything on the market for polishing and taking care of drum finishes, so someone I knew from racing someone who owned a chemical company that made the absolute best car polishes, so I asked him to help me formulate a drum polish, he did and I was in business. In the early days I would load-up my pick-up truck after bottling the polish with a home made filling machine and drive from music store to music store selling it."

**SB: What was next?**

MD: "After originally starting Trick in Tempe Arizona I moved it to Chicago to take advantage of the vast industrial and manufacturing base here. While in Arizona I briefly collaborated with another guy on making some wood shell snare drums, but quickly realized I knew a better way of doing things. The first Trick brand snares were called Kodiak T6 and were machined from solid 6061-T6 aluminum on CNC lathes and mills."

**SB: Did drummers like and accept the aluminum Kodiak T6 drums?**

MD: "Yes! We sold every one we could make, in fact we would still be making them but the aluminum mill stopped manufacturing the raw material in the size and shape we required."

**SB: Then what?**

MD: "Having no desire to make drums from wood, I needed to figure out another way of making my aluminum shells, which I did and it's the shell design we currently use for both snares and drum kits. This was a blessing in disguise, because if I wasn't forced to find a new way of making the snare shells, we may never have developed the drum sets. I learned a lot about making drum shells during the process of developing the current Trick shell, let me tell you there was a lot of trial and error to get it right, from the right alloy to the exact right thickness, to the bearing edge design."

**SB: I heard a rumor that you're the only one who knows the chemical formula for the aluminum alloy Trick uses to make the drum shells, is that true?**

MD: "Myself and the metallurgists."

**SB: How many different types of aluminum could there possibly be?**

MD: "By mixing different alloys and heat treats, you could potentially achieve thousands of different types, we use one."

**SB: You must have known you would meet with some resistance to drum kits made from metal?**

MD: "I knew there would be some, but I never dreamed it would be so difficult. However I knew and believed from the moment I made the very first full kit that the aluminum drums sounded better, not just better but a lot better and had a host of other benefits too. It was funny, the first tom tom I made was a 12X14, the minute I finished building it I called my friend and drummer Randi Scott on the phone and played it for him, he almost came through the phone with excitement over the sound, Randi is with me to this day playing Trick kits."

**SB: How did you deal with the skepticism surrounding the metal kits?**

MD: "I was convinced that Trick had built the future of professional drums, but I'm also a realist, so I needed to make sure my excitement wasn't clouding my judgment, so I asked another friend (my drum instructor) and an absolutely amazing drummer Dom Moio to play them, Dom makes his living playing drums, so he told me "Mike-e if they don't sound good on the gig and in the studio I can't use them regardless of our friendship." Dom's been playing Trick drums since 1995. It's been a long hard road promoting the metal shell technology which is why we're seventeen years down that road and the industry is just now taking notice. We have a lot of kits out there now all over the world, all it takes is drummers hearing one and they instantly notice the sonic difference. We get drummers all the time who will hear a set, go completely nuts over the sound and ask "what kind of wood are they", when we tell them they're an alloy, they're stunned!"

**SB: What are the major advantages of the alloy shell kits?**

MD: "Sonically they're more powerful and resonant than wood drums and they're much more consistent drum to drum. Trick shells are made from a solid one ply piece of aircraft grade material that is mill certified as to its



alloy, hardness and chemical make-up. This lets us achieve levels of consistency never before possible. Other drum companies have advertised how they have a guy tap each shell and assemble the kit with shells that are more closely matched. Trick shells sonically match automatically, since we don't use multiple plies of wood glued together, i.e. plywood, and we do use the most resonant, verifiably consistent material available, all Trick kits match perfectly every time. The only difference from shell to shell is the depth and diameter, the material is the same with none of the inconsistencies (hardness, moisture content, glue), found in plywood drums. Because they're metal and more durable, Trick drums stand up to the rigors of the road and the elements much better than wood, in fact they're impervious to and completely unaffected by hot, cold or humidity and they will never delaminate. Another advantage, no trees cut down!"

**SB: How did the GS007 throw off come about?**

MD: "We were using the throw offs that were readily available, all of which for Trick were of marginal or poor quality, I just made it a priority that we come up with an ultra-high quality throw off. Our engineers Big Bob and George worked tirelessly on designs and prototypes until we had it right. At first we made it with the intention of using it on just Trick drums, but when we debuted it at the NAMM Show, we were inundated with other drum companies wanting to use it. The GS007 is now standard issue on the world's finest snare drums."

**SB: What makes it so different?**

MD: "The GS007 is all machined from solid billet metals consisting of aluminum and stainless steel, it uses a helical cam to raise and lower the snares, the cam rides on roller bearings to give it a frictionless, effortless motion. People told me I was crazy for trying to sell a throw off at our price point when you can buy imported ones for \$10.00, all I can say, people still appreciate quality and value, yes our GS007 is expensive by comparison but its quality and value is obvious to our customers. Trick is exposing the drum business to the world of close tolerance machined parts, the difference in quality and function is profound especially when compared to the stamped / die cast parts which are so common in the drum industry. In the racing business everything is machined, not only for durability but for precision, in racing precision is essential to winning. Our way of manufacturing is expensive, but our philosophy is we don't make products to meet a price point, we make the best product we possibly can and then deliver it at the best price possible."

**SB: Now tell us about the Pro 1-V bass drum pedal.**

MD: "The positive feedback we received on the GS007 gave me confidence that drummers wanted more of our style of product. I'm the luckiest guy in the world in that every member of my team is obsessed with what we do and the status quo is simply not tolerated. I dedicated all of our resources both financially and intellectually to the development of a completely new bass drum pedal. In the first of hundreds of meetings, I sat with our engineers Big Bob, George and Robert and explained the mission. None of them are drummers, so they had no familiarity with current bass drum pedal designs, I viewed this as a blessing because intellectually they were starting with a clean slate and weren't trying to refresh an old design. The one thing I knew we absolutely had to have, based on my experience with other pedals, was a compression spring. From building engines which use compression springs to run the valve train, I knew that the compression spring was essential to the design, and we built the pedal around this key component. The Pro 1-V project really hooked George (Szwaya), who at times during the two years of development worked day and night as evidenced by finding him sleeping in the shop the next morning surrounded by empty Red Bull cans and pizza boxes. The Pro 1-V is packed full of features which were designed to let the drummer zero in on his or her exact, optimal settings. Every critical adjustment (spring tension, beater angel, footboard angel, beater height and pitch) on the Pro 1-V is accurately adjustable one degree at a time. This level of precision adjustment was simply not available until the Pro 1-V. Our double version is two functioning singles, we don't use a slave pedal system, this way both of the pedals can be adjusted exactly the same or differently to compensate for differences in agility between the right and left leg. In addition to infinite adjustability and fine-tune-ability, we built the Pro 1-V to be durable and road worthy, for example our footboard can sustain 12,000 pounds of force before it breaks."

**SB: What's next on the drawing board?**

MD: "Our plate is really full right now, of course we have new designs in the works, but we're concentrating more on improving delivery time and customer service."

**SB: Wow!**

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Trick Drums  
Pro 1-V  
Bass Drum  
Pedal



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