

Rogers Wood Dyna

There are slightly different versions of the birth of the dynasonic snare drum and most of them are fairly accurate, with slight variations here and there. The late Ellis Tollin, a good friend and one of the key creators of this drum, tells the story as follows:

Ellis was a Rogers dealer through his Music City store in Philadelphia. He was very close to Buddy Rich as well as many other prominent drummers of the time. He also knew Ben Strauss and Joe Thompson of Rogers. In the late 50's and early 60's, Ben and Joe began the creation of a "new" Rogers and were intent on making significant product changes. Joe Thompson's revolutionary swivo-matic hardware was a prime example of state of the art innovation. However, Joe was an "inventor", not a drummer. Ben was a keen marketer, but he was not a drummer. In fact, Ben was a trumpet player. Ellis was a man who knew the "ins and outs" of what makes a drum work, and he had excellent ideas for improving them. He also knew what drummers wanted, and he knew Buddy Rich. Ellis had convinced Buddy to join Rogers, but Buddy wanted a snare drum that would respond at any volume level with superb sensitivity and without choking. Ellis, Ben, and Joe took Buddy's challenge and set out to create a new drum that would satisfy Buddy. Ellis had always contended that a snare bed was not necessary, and he also strongly supported the idea that snares should be brought up to just "kiss" the snare head rather than pulling them taught in the traditional manner, which he felt choked the drum and reduced responsiveness. Ellis knew what drummers wanted and had the concepts for improving the sound and responsiveness, Joe had the "know how" to make it work, and Ben had the marketing skill to make it saleable to the masses. The

collaboration of these three minds resulted in a truly unique snare drum. And yes, the story about Ellis, Joe, and Ben being stranded for several days at Ellis's home during a snowstorm is true. It is also true that they emerged from this event with prototype designs for the drum.

My love for Rogers wood dynasonic snare drums goes back to the very first time I saw a photo of one. That photo was the black and white shot of a white marine pearl dynasonic in Rogers catalog #64R. The technology behind that drum was unique for its time, and even by today's standards it is, in my opinion, a great design and a fabulous sounding drum. I was twelve years old when that catalog was issued, and these drums were so scarce that I didn't actually see a wood dynasonic until I was well into my forties. The first one I ever owned is the pre-badge wood dynasonic shown here, and I acquired it about 5 years ago. Since that time I have bought and sold many other wood dynasonics, and have had a particularly keen interest in those that are in extremely fine, original condition, and also those that represent the most difficult colors to find. White Marine Pearl is my weakness, which is fairly evident from the photos you'll see here. The drums shown here are all part of my personal collection with one exception, the beautiful blue strata drum was sold recently to a very good friend, who is also a very astute collector. I hope you enjoy these photos.

White Marine Pearl Pre-badge Dynasonic

A New Old Stock drum purchased from the music store that bought it new from the factory and never sold it. This is a superb example of the earliest wood dynasonics. These drums pre-date the use of an external badge. Instead, there is a paper tag attached to the inside of the shell with the word "dynasonic" typed on it. Although almost impossible to verify with total accuracy, it is believed that less than 3000 wood dynasonics were built, and of this number, probably less than 50 were pre-badge drums, most of which did not survive.



-sonic Picture Gallery

by Stephen Maxwell

Ellis Tollin's White Marine Pearl Dynasonic

This Dayton era drum bears serial # 15220. Ellis Tollin was one of the founding fathers of the dynasonic snare drum. His input, along with that of Buddy Rich, Joe Thompson, and Ben Strauss of Rogers, helped create Rogers' snare drum masterpiece. Ellis's first WMP dynasonic had been stolen many years ago. The drum shown here was given to Ellis by me, and he played it until he passed on in 2001. Ellis signed the inside of the shell of this drum, and it is complete with documentation between Ellis and myself, as well as Ellis's widow.



White Marine Pearl Transition Dynasonic

This Cleveland era drum bears serial # 3132 and was made at the time when Rogers migrated from the crack-prone B&B lugs to the sturdy, attractive "beavertail" design. During this transition period the rounded "clockface" strainer and the high hoops used on the earlier B&B drums were carried over until the stock was used up. Rogers then moved to a "straight sided" version of the strainer and lowered the height of the hoops. Very few drums are seen in the configuration show here.



Dayton Era White Marine Pearl Dynasonic No Internal Muffler, Serial #22049

This drum has not been drilled for an internal muffler. According to the late Ellis Tollin, this drum was built for an endorser, most likely Buddy Rich or Louis Bellson, both of whom ordered their wood dynas without internal mufflers. He also indicated that all special orders of this type were handled through his Music City drum shop in Philadelphia. Also, Buddy Rich routinely requested additional lacquering of the interior of the shell in order to improve sound quality. The interior of the shell on this drum is lacquered beyond what is normally seen on these drums. This is the only drum I have ever encountered in this configuration. I wish I could prove conclusively that this drum was built for Buddy or Louis!



Blue Strata Dynasonic, Serial #20337

Blue strata was a color listed in the Rogers catalog only in 1967. Rogers drums in this finish are rare, and this is the only wood dyna I have ever encountered in this finish. Examples of this finish show up occasionally on kits built after 1967 since manufacturers tended to use up their product rather than discard it after elimination from the catalog. This drum is exceedingly clean and looks like a New Old Stock drum.



Mardi Gras Dynasonic, Serial #1034

Although WMP is a rare finish that is highly sought after, Mardi Gras is even more scarce when it comes to wood dynasonics. This drum bears serial #1034, which makes it the 33rd wood dynasonic built after the introduction of the external badge, which started at serial #1001.



6.5x14 Red Onyx Dynasonic, Serial #17961

6.5" wood dynasonics are exceedingly rare. Very few were made, and there are very few examples in existence. I have only handled a few, and have never handled another one in this finish. Red Onyx is a rare finish for wood dynas, and finding a 6.5 in Red Onyx is extremely rare.



Wood Dyna-sonic Color Rarity

Common Colors: Red Sparkle, Blue Sparkle, Silver Sparkle, BDP

Tougher Colors: Blue Onyx, Red Onyx, Black Onyx

Toughest Colors: WMP (the Holy Grail, but there are examples to be found), Black Strata (I've seen a few), Blue Strata (ultra hard, I've only seen one and I had it), Pink Strata (ultra hard, I only know of one), Mardi Gras (ridiculously hard, I know of one, which is the B & B lug drum I have. . Have never seen a beavertail), Green Sparkle (only know of one original), Gold Sparkle (have only seen a few), Wildwood (I know of only one, the 6.5" I have).

Almost ANY 6.5" wood dyna is ultra rare. There are very few examples remaining, and there were far fewer of these produced than the 5's. However, I have seen Blue Sparkle examples and also Silver Sparkle. Those are fairly common.

WMP 6.5" is ultra tough and a true Holy Grail. I have a 6.5" Wildwood, which is believed to be unique since none were ever built for stock. I have a 6.5" Red Onyx and have not seen another. Suffice it to say that a 6.5" is extremely rare, and a tougher color is truly a remarkable find. These are A LOT more expensive than a comparable color 5".

Wine Red Ripple Dynasonic, Serial #1808

This is one of the early B&B lug drums made after the introduction of the external badge, which started with serial #1001. This color is rare and the finish is extremely vivid on this drum, which came from the collection of Harry Cangany, noted drum historian and author.



6.5x14 Wildwood Dynasonic, Serial #12237

Not only is this drum a rare 6.5, but it is also a Wildwood shell. Wildwood was created by injecting dye into trees, thereby creating striations of color in the wood. Fender originally used this method for their Coronado guitars, and then applied the concept to Rogers. The color was not a popular choice for Fender or Rogers, so the process was discontinued and few drums were built. Over time, the dye used in the process had a tendency to fade. When authenticating this drum, sources employed at Rogers during this era indicated that no wood dynas in this finish were built for stock. They were done on a special order basis only. In addition, the rare 6.5" size indicates that this drum may in fact be unique.



If you ever have a chance to own one of these fine drums I would highly recommend it. Nice original examples of common colors are still very expensive compared to today's commercially available drums, and pristine examples in difficult colors are even more expensive. But, since there will be no more of these built, their numbers are limited. Additionally, these are not drums that have to be put on a shelf. These drums are extremely playable. A very good friend of mine is the principal percussionist of a major symphony orchestra and he has been using wood dynasonics with the orchestra for years. I also know jazz and rock players who use them regularly.

In closing, I'd like to address one controversial point: Some players maintain that the dynasonic (wood or brass shell) is a finicky drum

that is difficult to tune. For those of you out there who have difficulty tuning a dynasonic I offer a tuning tip direct from Ellis Tollin.

1. Tune the top head somewhat tighter than the bottom head
2. Bring the snares up til they just "kiss" the bottom head. If there is too much snare "buzz" adjust the snares using the screw on the snare frame, not the tension knob on the strainer.
3. If you still think the drum isn't sensitive enough back off the tension (very slightly) on the tension rods on each side of the butt plate and strainer. By backing off these four tension rods just a little, you create a little more vibration in the area of the snare frame.

Try it. It really works!

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