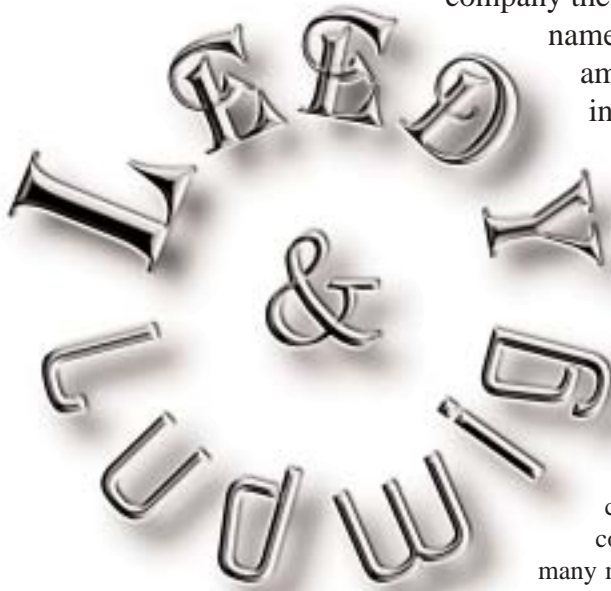


Drums From the Past

I affectionately call the “knob tension drums” from the Leedy & Ludwig company the “beginning of the end for Leedy.” Others give them the name “the Edsel of the drum industry!” It is true that the amount of effort that went into both the design and marketing of these drums was tremendous by the standards of post war drum making.



Knob Tension Drums

Michael Gilbert

Shortly after the second world war both the Ludwig and Leedy companies were merged together to form one production drum company under the ownership of the GC Conn company. There were many members of the CONN company who believed that drum manufacturing simply wasn't a profitable business. This consolidation was done to save both production and labor costs.

During this time, George Way worked for Leedy and presented his “Leedy Waybest Precision Tension Drum” ideas. This would later become the basis for the “knob tension drums”.

The idea was terrific, a drummer could tune both the batter and snare heads at the same time without a screwdriver or lug wrench. It sounded great!

Without the same resources of pre-WWII GC Conn company, the post war GC Conn company embarked on huge expenditures trying to grab market share with their unique “Knob Tension” Drums.

The company focused solely on marketing this product as it's high end drum line.

Well within a very short time, all of the endorsers and dealers realized that the drums were destined to fail. The parts of the tension mechanisms would break easily. The drums would not stay in tune, the quality was suspect as many of the tuning mechanisms would bend or break.



This huge investment turned out to be a major embarrassment and disaster for the GC Conn company. Their financial losses were so great that this failure opened the way for the sale of both the Leedy drum company and the Ludwig Drum company as a way for The GC Conn company to rid themselves of the embarrassment of the “knob tension fiasco”.

Today, these drums have become a “collector's only” item. There exists many fine examples of the “knob tension drums” both in kits and single snares. I own a well worn set of knob tension drums. At the recent Chicago vintage drum show, one attendee actually played my set. I wasn't sure whether I was happy or not!

These remnants of a by-gone era and the wonton desire to push the drum manufacturing envelope created the most consistent result of a “rush to excellence”----abstract failure.

So into the collection, goes the dubious notoriety of the “Knob Tension Drums.”

The end of the GC Conn Drum Company making venture.