

A TOPHAT

by Jack Lawton

Now Ludwig & Ludwig introduces another big FIRST to add to their list of important merchandise improvements and developments, and it promises to be a big favorite with progressive drummers who want the latest and finest in drum finishes. Aristocratic in it's general styling, the beautiful White Avalon Pearl which covers the Bass Drum, Snare Drum, and Tom Tom Shells is further enhanced in appearance with the addition of the attractive "Top Hat" design...which is actually part of the pearl itself and not "pasted on" or painted to the outside. You'll be amazed at the striking beauty and attraction which this new, modern creation in drum pearls provides. This outfit is truly "Tops" in appearance, ... Don't buy any outfit until you see this one!... reprinted from Ludwig catalog circa 1940

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Around 1940, the Ludwig & Ludwig Drum Company introduced this unique Avalon Pearl finish, which was only available for a few years. For the progressive drummer who wanted his "Swing Sensation" outfit covered in this new material, he'd have to shell out an additional \$ 17.00. The "Swing Sensation" outfit consisted of a 6.5 x 14 wood shell snare drum, 14 x 26 separate tension bass drum, 7 x 11, 9 x 13, and 14 x 16 separate tension tom toms, cymbals, hardware, sticks and brushes, all for a list price of \$ 342.00!



Fast forward fifty-five years or so. I received several photos in the mail from friend and fellow collector Chuck Scalia. He had just acquired a set of Ludwig & Ludwigs finished in Top Hat & Cane. The outfit was previously stored on a damp cellar floor for many years without the bottom heads on the toms. Needless to say, that kind of environment takes it's toll on glue rings and bearing edges. Fortunately, the finish was still intact and in good condition, with the exception of some cracks and lifted seams on the bass drum. This

AND TWO RIGHT GLOVES

set was a perfect candidate for some serious restoration work. After the drums arrived at our shop, I was really taken by the “striking beauty and attraction” of the finish. I try to record information about vintage drums that come here for restoration, for future reference. I thought it might be a good idea to trace the design on a piece of mylar with pen and ink, and then file it away, just in case I’d need it someday.

A few months later, I got a call from a customer who had a set of drums he wanted refinished, and asked if there was any chance that the Top Hat & Cane finish would ever be available. The unusual thing about this project was he wanted the design on *Champagne Sparkle* for a set of *Rogers* drums! I took the sheet of mylar out of the file and went to a local graphic arts company. They shot a silk screen of the design, and using a special ink that was formulated for use on plastics, they screened the design on the Champagne Sparkle, along with several sheets for an off-white pearl finish. After the Rogers project was completed, I decided to wrap a late 60’s five piece Ludwig outfit to display at the 1997 Pennsylvania Vintage Drum Show. I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of interest generated by the outfit, and absolutely thrilled when the kit sold before noon! During the show, Harry Cangany of the Drum Center of Indianapolis (author of the book “The Great American Drums...And The Companies That Made Them. 1920 - 1960”) visited our booth to check-out that outfit, and mentioned that Top Hat & Cane



was one of his all time favorite finishes. About a year later, Harry was talking with Ludwig’s Jim Catalano about some possible limited edition snare drums that Ludwig should consider for their 90th Anniversary. In addition to the Engraved Black Beauty and a Solid Maple snare drum, Harry suggested that they give me a call to see about the possibility of having a snare drum done in Top Hat & Cane. A few days later, Jim called and asked if they could send us a 6.5 x 14 to wrap, so they could test the waters with it at the 1999 Winter NAMM Show. It evidently was well received. Shortly after NAMM,



we got a purchase order to wrap ninety 6.5 x 14 snare drums as soon as possible. We didn’t have enough material for the project, so when we ordered the pearl, we had the center layer of vinyl shipped to the silk screener to apply the design prior to the final lamination, so the artwork would actually be in the finish, just like the original.

We got the official go-ahead from Ludwig in late January, but didn’t have the material until mid-March. The ninety snare drums were finished and delivered by early June. Then, in August, a second purchase order arrived, this time, for ninety 5 x 14 snare drums, along with three outfits, one for Bun E. Carlos, Joey Kramer, and Ludwig’s artist Relation Manager Todd Trent. The outfits were finished first and the snare drums were completed by early December.

With the project completed, we had agreed that the balance of material would not be sold to do-it-yourselfers, for fear it might end up on a set of Pearl Exports or TAMA Rock Stars, *not that there is anything wrong with those drums*, but, we were concerned that it could lessen the value of the limited edition Ludwig snares. It was decided that the left over material would remain here to wrap on vintage Ludwig, WFL, or Ludwig & Ludwig drums, or custom built reproductions using Ludwig hardware. Since then, we have recovered several outfits and snare drums, and have built a few custom sets, snares, and a cocktail outfit. The present supply of material will do no more than ten outfits, and some snare drums. If you would like additional information on pricing and availability, contact the Lawton Drum Company at (570)988-0655 or fax your request to (570)988-0656.