

# MikeDolbear.com

## Hansen Futz Pedal

Practice pedals are a new idea. We've had bass drum practice pads which mount over the bass drum head and pads which you attach a bass drum pedal too, but to my knowledge, Hansen Futz (WHAT a great name!) are the first self contained practice pedals. I've been aware of them for about a year and a half and The Music Shipping Company is distributing them over here in the UK. I've read a fair bit about them on various forums, but there seemed to be a lack of certain knowledge about them, so I was very keen to get my hands on them. As well as being practice pedals, they are also useable as electronic trigger pedals and percussion pedals – they really do seem to be a bit of a jack-of-all-trades, but, to sound like a cheesy TV show... are they a master of any of them? We sent Simon... oh... sorry... carried away. Ahem.



The Hansen Futz pedals (or just Futz, as Hansenfutz – the company- calls them), are made from black plastic and have a slightly delta shaped footboard which hinges over a floor plate which has industrial Velcro on the bottom. You have to use the Futz on carpet – wooden floor are NOT an option. The hinge has a spring mounted inside which is adjustable with a large flat blade screwdriver and the angle of the footboard is adjustable by repositioning a crosshead screw into one of three locating holes. You have to be careful while adjusting the spring tension and angle to prevent injury from twanging springs, but the pedals come with very clear instructions and you can be set up in a few minutes. The actual pedal plate is 10" long by 5" at its widest point and has six raised 'V's and the Futz name which provide a bit of traction. Everything is reinforced and despite being plastic, the pedals are quite sturdy. They do feel quite light but they have stood up to me stomping on them with my size 13's, and as long as you pick them up correctly (to avoid damaging the spring), I can't see why they wouldn't last. If you do manage to damage them though, they are cheap enough to buy replacements without the bank manager worrying.



The Hansen Futz with the percussion plate

The floor plate has a tubular tower section on it that hits the underside of the footplate when it is pushed. There is a section on the underside of the footplate into which foam discs slot. Each foam disc has a hard rubber circle attached to it and which foam disc you put into it determines how noisy the pedal is. There are three different discs available – the solid foam one (soft) is pretty much totally silent, then there is a thin plastic one (medium) that makes a quiet click sound and a thick plastic disc (hard) that is the loudest.

To be honest there wasn't much difference between the two plastic discs and I preferred the thick plastic one, as it made sure that I could really hear exactly what I was playing.

Now, I am guessing that most, probably 90%, of bass drum pedals have a footplate that is hinged to a heel plate. The heel plate rest on the floor and so your heel is only a centimetre above the floor (depending on how thick the soles of your shoes are – if you regularly play in high heeled shoes or boots, you can forget about this bit). Now, as the hinge of the Futz contains the spring, it is quite chunky, so the sole of your shoe will never be closer than 4cm from the floor. This might not sound much but it does feel different from a 'normal' bass drum pedal, as the pivoting position is slightly different. If you only ever play heel up, this wont be so much different for you, but you might notice it if you play heel down. For those players out there who remember them, it feels like an old Premier 252 with solid footplate.

Another thing to bear in mind is that when you push a standard bass drum pedal, you are causing a fair bit of metal and felt to move and gain momentum towards the bass drum head, and this is what gives each bass drum pedal its individual feel. On the Futz, the only thing that is moving is your foot and the plastic footplate. You are pushing against a spring but on a standard pedal, once you have got the beater moving towards the head, it will continue, to a degree, to carry on moving by itself. Not so with the Futz. What I am trying to say here is that the Futz does not feel like your favourite bass drum pedal for quite a few physical reasons.

So, as a practice pad, how does it feel?

Honestly?

Well... once I had got the pedal angle and spring tension right, I put the pedals down on to a carpet (got to be carpet, they don't stick to wooden floors like I have in my practice room) and started to play and immediately realised that I couldn't play any doubles. This came as a bit of a shock as I know I can on a conventional pedal. When I got to think about it though, it made sense. When we play doubles on a normal bass drum pedal, we tend to rely on the bounce back from the head to push the beater back so we can play the second beat. Or at least I do. It's the same as when we first learn to play double with our hands – we rely on the bounce rather than on actually playing both notes. However, when you learn to play both notes and not rely on the bounce, your doubles leap ahead in power and speed. Once I had got my head around that, I went back and started to play doubles by actually playing them, it all worked and my feet really came together. Don't expect to sit down at these pedals and not work at it. You need to work at them with good technique and your feet will really progress.

Now I didn't have a gig on the first night so I decided to set up a little practice kit with the two Futz and a Real Feel pad (reviewed elsewhere). I went to a local DIY store and bought a rubber backed, carpet top doormat and put that on the wooden floor of my practice room. I then put a Futz into the far corners, Velcroed to the mat, and put the Real Feel pad on a snare stand in the centre, which helped to hold the mat in place. I then set up a cymbal pad from an electronic kit on a cymbal stand, and Voila! A small practice kit.

I really worked on my feet and after a while was really getting on well with the Futz. I was really curious to see how the workout had affected my foot technique and at the gig the next night, I have got to say that my feet were REALLY comfortable. Now, I cant say that this was totally down to the Futz as I don't often spend that much time concentrating mostly on my feet, but as it made foot practice much easier and more portable, it's got to take some credit.

At first I really didn't like the Futz, but with a little perseverance I now love them. I am a little bit of a glutton for punishment so perversely, I enjoyed the fact that I couldn't play them well at the start. If you sit down in a shop and try these, you have got to appreciate that they will feel weird and awkward, but it's like anything good in life - you will only get out what you put in.

#### Futz Trigger Pedal

One of the Futz's alter egos is an electronic trigger pedal. Hansenfutz were kind enough to supply a Pintech RS-5 trigger that is the model they recommend and is available as an optional extra. The trigger sticks to the floor plate near to the tower section and it has a self-adhesive socket holder on it that also sticks to the floor plate and prevents the cable being pulled unnecessarily. When you use the Futz as a trigger pedal, you need to use the thick plastic insert so that there is a big enough impact when the pedal is played.

I've got to say that as a trigger pedal, it works very well. You have to turn up the rejection in your module to prevent the trigger being accidentally triggered by floor vibration, but when that is adjusted correctly, the world is your (foot triggering) oyster. There's not much to say about this, as so much can be adjusted in your module, except that it works. Very well.





Hansen Futz Percussion Stand

### Futz Accessory Pedal

The last of Futz's disguises is that of accessory pedal. This is for when you want to play percussion with your feet whilst playing drum kit or congas etc. When you use it in this form, you need to use two other bits, which come as optional extras. The first is a metal beater that slides into a receiver at the front of the pedal. The beater is made from solid steel rod, is about 10cm long and has a rubber coating on the last 4cm. The second bit is a steel stand that holds the instrument you want to hit. The stand has a plate 18x8cm and a 9cm long rod comes out from it. The plate has industrial Velcro on it and it designed to stick to the floor in front of the Futz and the cowbell or tambourine or what ever you want to play fits onto the rod that sticks upwards. You HAVE to set up on

carpet to use this or rely on the doormat method as I did, and it works well but there is one problem that is intrinsic to the whole Futz system.

All bass drum pedals work on the cam action principal. This means that the beater does not move at the same speed as the pedal – it moves faster. When you push down your bass drum pedal, the footplate might move maybe 8cm, but the beater may move twice that far. This is because of the mechanics and leverage of the pedal and means we can get nice loud hits without physically jumping on the footplate. Simply put, the beater moves faster and further than your foot. On the Futz, because the beater is attached to the footplate, it moves at the same speed, therefore, it can never hit the mounted percussion on the holder as loud as a bass drum pedal can. The only way to do that would be to have a beater the same length again as the pedal, which would be impractical and awkward.

Now, this isn't a problem as such, but it is something to be aware of – the Futz Accessory pedal isn't very loud – BUT, and it's a BIG BUT – that might be just what you are looking for. After all Gajate brackets and bass drum pedals aren't cheap and you might want a selection of percussion to play with your feet that aren't over bearingly loud and without breaking the bank.

So, in conclusion, I have got to say that I REALLY like the Futz pedals. They have given my practice routine a new lease of life, they are cheap, they work VERY well as practice pedals and trigger pedals and well but quietly as an accessory pedal. They are the best sort of practice tool in that you have got to work at them to get the best out of them (and your feet), they are small enough to be put in a flight bag, suitcase or back stage bag which is a great encouragement for extra practice, and they appear to be sturdy and well made.

One little thing I did find which may be of use to you if you buy some of these for practice, is that the pedal feels slightly better if you mount the percussion rod in the front of the pedal. It gives the pedal a little more weight and substance as you foot is actually moving more mass. It's just a little thing but it worked for me.

I have only said this once before in the 70 odd reviews I have written for the site, but I was so impressed, I am going to buy two. Superb.

Simon Edgoose