

# Drum Tech DTS One-Touch Tuning System

>>The Answer You've Been Waiting For

by Michael Dawson

Because the DTS System allows you to tension each drumhead with one screw, finding a perfect drum sound has never been easier.

## KEY NOTES

- Tunes entire head with one hex-bolt tension screw
- Removes need for fine-tuning individual lugs
- Great for quick tuning changes
- Some drum hardware can inhibit tuning cable

**T**uning drums can be a major drag. Even if you've spent hours fine-tuning every lug and you've found the perfect balance between the heads to give you just the right amount of pitch bend, as soon as you take your drums out of your practice room and into some dingy club with concrete floors and plate-glass windows, they inevitably sound like a pile of pots and pans.

The guys at Drum Tech must have had similar frustrations, because they've spent the past fifteen years refining a system that streamlines the tuning process so that you spend less time tweaking and more time playing. The result of their efforts is the DTS One-Touch Tuning System.

### A Three-Part System

The DTS System has three main components: a single-bolt tension assembly (to tighten or loosen the head), a tension distribution cable (to apply tension evenly around the drum), and tension brackets (to transfer the cable tension to the individual tension rods).

The tension brackets are small levers made of aircraft-grade aluminum. They slide under the head of each tension rod, and you secure them in place by finger-tightening each lug. The coated distribution cable fits around the rim—resting in channels in the tension brackets—and then attaches to the tension blocks in the tension assembly.

The pitch of the head is adjusted by turning the tension assembly's hex bolt with an Allen wrench (included with each system). By turning the bolt clockwise, the ends of the distribution cable are pulled together. This causes the tension brackets to squeeze inward and push up on the underside of the tension rods. That pressure causes the rim to pull down, resulting in a higher pitch. And because the tension brackets receive equal force, the head tunes up evenly.

With this one-touch tuning system, you can play and listen to the results as you sweep through the drum's entire tuning range. This process can be done in a *fraction* of the time it would take using traditional tuning methods.

### The Installation

Installing a DTS system for the first time can be a little tricky. First, you have to remove all of the washers from the tension rods. Then you finger-tighten each lug to where there's just enough space between the rim



With the DTS System, you can tune your drums by ear by adjusting the tension assembly as you play.

As the tension distribution cable is tightened, the tension brackets apply force to the underside of the tension rod, which causes the hoop to pull down.





A complete DTS System is comprised of a tension assembly, tension brackets, and a tension distribution cable.

and the rod to allow you to slide in the tension brackets. Once you've done that, each lug has to be tightened slightly so that it pinches the tension brackets into place.

The next step is to wrap the distribution cable around the drum—making sure it's aligned with the grooves in the tension brackets—to determine where to place the cable in the back of the tension assembly's tension blocks. As you're figuring out the proper positioning, it's important to pull the cable firmly so that you get the widest possible tuning range. (The DTS's instruction manual includes a settings chart to help determine the best cable positioning.)

After you've pinpointed the cable's position, you then disassemble the tension assembly and secure the ball-ends of the cable into the corresponding notches of the tension blocks. Then you piece the assembly together, place it along the lower flange of the rim, and wrap the distribution cable around the drum and onto the tension brackets.

### To The Test

Once the DTS system was properly installed (we used the system on the top and bottom heads of 10", 12", 14", and 16" toms and the top of a ten-lug 14" snare), we began our test by seeing how quickly we could take the batter head of a 14" floor tom from completely slack to its highest tension. The results? Ten seconds. (Try doing *that* with conventional tuning.)

But being able to tension a drum with lightning speed would be meaningless if it didn't produce an even tone. So we tuned the heads back down to their lowest useable settings, and then gradually increased the tension on the top head. Throughout the tuning range, the drum's tone sounded amazingly even, with minimal funky overtones. We also discovered several great-sounding tension settings that we didn't even know this drum was capable of producing.

Once we settled on a batter head tension that felt good to play on, we tried sweeping through different bottom head tensions to find the intervals between the heads that make the drum sing. With conventional tuning, this is a process of trial & error. But with the DTS system, you can audition all of the possible top-to-bottom ratios in a matter of seconds. All you have to do is play the drum, tighten the hex bolt, and listen to the results.

### In The Real World

The DTS system was also tested at a gig with minimal setup time and at a quick two-hour recording session. In both cases, the DTS was a lifesaver. For the gig, I had about ten minutes to get the drums from the green room to the stage. So there wasn't much time to tweak the tuning of the kit. But because of the DTS, the tone of the toms was quickly dialed in to work with the not-so-flattering sound of the room.

At the recording session, the producer had two hours to get drum sounds, teach the arrangement, and record the take. For the verses, he wanted me to ride on the floor tom, which led to the dreaded question: Can you tune your tom to match the key of the song?

Normally that would cause me to start sweating bullets, especially with only a short amount of time to complete the track. But with the DTS, it was simple: The guitarist played the desired note, and then the hex bolts on the top and bottom heads were adjusted until the pitches were in sync. This entire process was completed in less than two minutes.

### Yeah, But...

Throughout our testing, we found very few drawbacks with the DTS One-Touch Tuning System. However, there are a couple of minor issues to consider. First, if you use RIMS suspension mounts, you'll need to purchase Drum Tech's Rim-Mount Spacer Kit to prevent the RIMS from obstructing the DTS.

There is also the possibility that your floor tom legs or other hardware might extend too close to the rim to allow the distribution cable to flow smoothly. So you may have to figure out a way to elevate the hardware from the shell. (Homemade cardboard or plastic gaskets are an easy, inexpensive way to add space to floor tom legs and snare strainers.)

Neither of these concerns, though, outweighs the benefits of being able to get your drums to sound great with only a few cranks of a tension bolt, especially if you find yourself changing tuning frequently for different-styled gigs or sessions. Plus, the DTS makes tuning drums *fun*. For that reason alone, this system is a must-have.

### THE NUMBERS

**DTS System (includes tension assembly, distribution cable, tension brackets, and hex-bolt wrench)**

Six-lug drums (per head) . . . . . \$49.99

Eight-lug drums (per head) . . . . . \$54.99

Ten-lug drums (per head) . . . . . \$59.99

The DTS retrofits to most acoustic drums and is available for drums 8" to 18" in diameter, and for six-, eight-, and ten-lug configurations. (Street prices are considerably lower than those listed here.) Component parts are also available.

#### Accessories

T-Handle Wrench . . . . . \$9.99

Rim-Mount Spacers . . . . . \$9.99

Bolt Lubricant . . . . . \$5.99

Bolt Assembly . . . . . \$11.99

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