

KILLOWATT

The page
that gets
into gear

THE FIRST kit I ever had was a Premier but I always fancied a Ludwig — probably because that's what Ringo Starr played. I was in a youth club band at the time and we were doing Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly songs. I got my first Ludwig kit in 1964, I think. It cost £350 and my dad signed the HP form. I had to meet something like £12.00 a week in repayments which was more than I was earning a month out of the band. But I had to have one just the same.

"Trouble was I soon realised I wanted a bigger kit than I'd got, one with lots of tom-toms. So I started to replace bits of it. I kept all the hardware — the stands and cymbals and so on — but I changed all the shells until I'd got a 24in hem bass drum, a 14in x 10in small tom and an 18in x 16in deep tom. And I played that set-up for years.

"It wasn't until Slade went to the States for the first time in 1973 that I got the kit I play now. We were supporting Humble Pie on the first tour they did after Peter Frampton had left and Clem Clempson joined. Jerry Shirley, their drummer, had a deal going with Ludwig and when we reached Chicago his drum roadie offered to take me to the Ludwig factory and introduce me to them. I was like a little kid with stars in his eyes — it was an amazing place. I didn't realise before but Ludwigs are one of the few genuine family businesses still left in America. Even old man Ludwig, who's dead now, was working there, testing the snares as they came off the line.

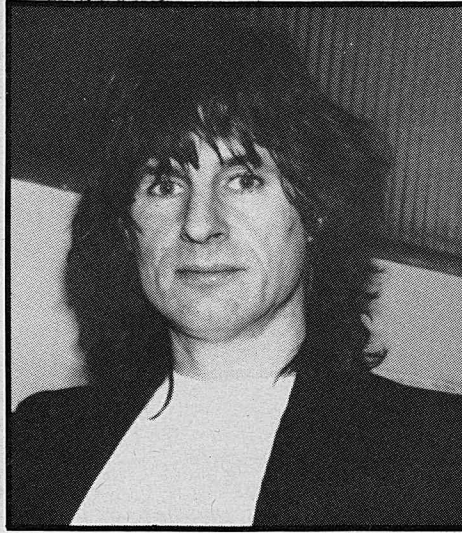
"They were so helpful too. Slade meant absolutely nothing in the States but they still offered me a discount that was like 40 per cent off factory price — which was ridiculously generous. And they also made me a kit to my own specifications. I wanted one that was larger than the average, you see. A 26in x 18in bass drum and 14in x 12in, 14in x 14in, 16in x 16in and 16in x 18in tom-toms as well as an 18in x 18in floor tom. I wanted all the shells extra thick, too, because I'd experienced trouble with drumshells losing their shape after getting knocked about on the road and going through temperature changes and so on. In fact, I ordered two of them and Ludwig shipped them over to England, arranged the customs duty and everything. All I had to do was go down to the airport and pick them up.

"I've kept up my deal with Ludwigs because I'm always needing to replace things. I'm very hard on my kits so I go through lots of cymbals, drumstands — and foot-pedals. I've got a box full of broken ones and they cost something like £70 to replace at shop prices. There just seems to be a certain point where the casting snaps off. But I've just discovered a guy back home in Wolverhampton — his name's John Haines — and he's found a way of rebuilding them so they never break again. The trouble is now I've got too many, but they never went regularly anyway. It was just like with sticks. I'd go for weeks and weeks and not break one and then suddenly three or four would go in quick succession.

PEOPLE always ask me why I bind my sticks with gaffa tape too. They think it's just to look flash on the TV but there's a far more practical reason behind it. It means I'm ready for when a stick breaks. There's nothing worse than when you've got your head down and bits of broken stick fly into your face. It's not so much the force as the shock, it can throw you off balance for a second or two. At least when they're taped up the sticks stay in one piece — even if they do go flabby.

But I use larger than average sticks, anyway. I

Ten years after his car crash, Slade's Don Powell still suffers from amnesia. But, as Chas de Whalley discovers, he still remembers why he tapes up his drumsticks and . . .



HOW TO USE THE TOILETS!

like them heavy, you see, so I have to get them specially made by a firm in Sheffield called Shaw. They turn me out a special line of C gauge sticks but a few thou thicker. I need them to play as hard as I do. When we first started drums never went through the PA so you had to whack them really hard to be heard over the bass and guitars.

In the early days I thought I was the loudest drummer around, until I saw John Bonham that is. He was playing in a pub band called Way Of Life who were doing the same gigs round Birmingham we were. And he was the only drummer I ever heard who actually gave me a headache. Some of the things he did! I couldn't work them out at all. But I've been playing heavy for so long I can't ease off any more. I was jamming with a band called Dream Cycle the other night and I was breaking so many sticks I had to stop before I used up every one the guy had. It's all because when I play with Slade I never have any drums in the monitors at all. I find that if I can hear myself too well then, subconsciously, I slacken off.

"I have two kits — one for studio and one for stage. And I have each one tuned differently. Drum tuning is all a matter of personal taste. Most drummers like to have their snares and tom-toms fairly tight, but I'm the opposite. My tom-toms have to be deep. I always keep the bottom skin pretty high because that helps to contain the note of the shell. But I slacken off the top, the batter skin, to get the exact note I want. On stage I use an oilskin on the snare so that it won't boom or resonate too much through the PA. An oilskin is made up of two

thin sheets of plastic with a film of oil in between them, but you have to have them tuned quite high because if you slacken them off all the tone goes and it's just like hitting a table top with your hand. So when I'm recording I use standard skins on the snare because they're much more flexible and they're great for miking up on tape too.

I USUALLY set my kit up in the toilets when we record. We use Portland Studios in Regent Street most of the time and the toilets there have a tremendous natural echo to them. It's all down to the tiles and the glass. But unfortunately Portland is in a big office block so people are wanting to use the toilets all the time. We have to wait until after six o'clock if I want to record. The first time we did it we cleared the building but forgot about the automatic flushing mechanism. There I was half way through a take and suddenly it sounded like I was playing in a rainstorm! All the toilets started flushing at once. Now we have to switch them off at the mains before I go in.

"I do lots of overdubs in the studio. One of my favourite drum sounds is the one on all those Al Green hits of 10 years ago. I think it was Bernard Purdie playing on them. Anyway, whoever it was got the deepest and thickest snare drum sound I've ever heard and it took me years to work out how it was done. Then I was listening on the cans one day and I noticed how the snare went suddenly thin whenever the drummer did a fill. It was only then I realised that he'd overdubbed a tom-tom onto the snare backbeat and the two together sounded really throaty. Sometimes I play tricks like that in the studio.

"We always lay down the basic rhythm track together with all four of us playing and Nod singing. In fact sometimes his guide vocal is so good it ends up on the final mix. But my original drums very rarely do. Once I've played it the first time you see I take the drums into the toilets and play the whole track again, exactly as I did previously. Occasionally I have to stop and check what I played on the previous take because a lot of fills I don't think about when I'm playing them, they just come off the top of my head. But when we've done all that, we've got two alternative drum tracks, both with very different sounds to them, and we're free to ditch one or the other, use bits of each or even mix the two together. That's what we did on 'Bring The House Down'. The drums on that are actually double-tracked which is why they sound so big and exciting!"

**NEXT
KERRANG!
OUT
APRIL 22
DON'T
MISS IT!**