

RESTORING A Black Beauty

by Billy Jeansonne

This early 1930's Ludwig "Black Beauty" snare drum is a 5" x 14" Super Ludwig, which has the parallel snare strainer. It is 100% original, including both calfskin heads (the bottom head was broken), adjustable snare wires, and all tension rods. It has a one piece brass shell with black nickel plating. The engraving pattern is a 10



point flower with all leaves pointed. It has the diamond center and none of the tip shading that is featured on the pre-1931 Black Beauties. There are straight "hammer stroked" lines that run down the center of the leaves. The rectangle that houses the Ludwig logo began around 1931 (Thanks to John Aldridge for a very complete description of this particular Black Beauty). This snare drum is complete with snare guards and original adjustable snare wires.

Being very particular about the condition and originality of a drum, especially a 1930's Ludwig Black Beauty, I decided to clean the drum to bring out its total beauty and playing performance. I did not want to alter the originality of this snare drum, but I knew so much of its beauty was hidden because over the years the drum had been collecting dust and the hardware had some tarnish to it. The hardware was most of what the task was going to consist of. So I did only what was necessary to bring this beautiful snare drum back to its original state.

First, I contacted John Aldridge. He explained the ins and outs of cleaning such a drum. He gave me his experienced expert advise on what to use and how to undertake such a task.

I also gathered as much knowledge that I possibly could from his book, "Guide To Vintage Drums". The book contains a chapter about "Restoring Black Engraved Drums". I also made several phone calls to different sources just trying to pick up every little bit of information that I could.

I learned very much about the hardware on this particular snare drum. While the earlier Ludwig De-Luxe Black Beauties had copper plating as their finish on the hardware, this model had the "imitation gold" finish. The tension rods, snare guards, and a few other parts were steel with brass plating. The steel was electro plated "flashed" with copper and then brass plated. Copper was visible at the areas where the brass was worn. Some of the parts; lugs, hoops, and several other parts were solid brass which showed signs of copper in it. This is called "bleeding". Brass is made of copper and tin. The copper actually pulls up to the surface if certain chemicals or oils are left on the brass.

I was now ready to start. But, I must tell you, along the way I stopped several times and contacted certain people about different aspects of the process. I did not want to take any chances of ruining this Black Beauty.

First, I took pictures of the drum to help inventory its parts and to make reassembly as easy as possible. The Super Ludwig does have very many strainer parts. I carefully removed all of the hardware and documented every lug, tension rod, screw,

washer, etc. Next, I carefully and GENTLY cleaned the shell using a mixture of very mild dishwashing liquid (Dawn) and cool water. Using a very soft cloth, I dried the shell. Next I applied 3 in One oil to the shell and rubbed it over the entire surface. A very soft, lint free cloth was used to gently rub most of the oil from the shell.



Before

I then took the shell, put it in a clean cloth, and put it away until the drum was ready for reassembly.

Next was the hardware. It was determined that the hardware on this era Black Beauty was not the copper finish, which would make it very difficult to work with since the copper plating was so thin and could easily be “cleaned” off. This Black Beauty has the imitation Gold De-Luxe finish. All of the hardware was in excellent condition and showed very little signs of wear. The problem was the tarnish. Through many years of the drum being handled, the lacquer had been worn off of the hardware leaving it exposed to air and oily hands which caused the finish to tarnish.

I was now ready to clean and restore the hardware. I wore rubber gloves for the entire cleaning and polishing process to protect my hands. First, I soaked the hardware in lacquer thinner overnight to soften and remove as much of the lacquer as possible. I removed the remaining lacquer with a soft toothbrush and lacquer thinner. I then removed the parts from the thinner and dried them. Just before cleaning, I placed the hardware under hot running water. This helped remove any remaining lacquer and made cleaning much easier. Wright’s Copper Cream was used to clean the hardware. It works very

well! Just dab the sponge in the cream and apply to the part being cleaned. Leave the cream on for a few minutes and gently rub with the supplied sponge. The part begins to look like new! Once it is clean and shiny, rinse again in hot running water. Gently dry with a soft cloth.

To add lustre to the parts, I gently polished them with Brasso, being sure to remove all of the Brasso polish. I cleaned the polished parts with denatured alcohol and clean lacquer thinner. This removed any remaining oils and prepared it for the lacquering process. From this point, all handling of the clean and polished parts were done with gloves to avoid oil and fingerprints. I had the lacquer professionally applied. This is one area of restoration that I did not want to tackle.

After the many steps it took to complete the overall job, I was finally ready to reassemble the drum. That was the easy part. I carefully put all the lugs back on the shell, reassembled



the strainer, put new Ludwig heads on the drum (I kept the original calfskin heads), and placed the snare wires back in position. I was now ready to stand back

and enjoy the beauty of this drum as it was meant to be in the early 1930’s. It is a “Black Beauty”.

I was finally ready to play this masterpiece. And play it I did. What a musical instrument! This is one snare drum that has not been improved on in the last 70-80 years by any drum company. It stands on its own merits, the Ludwig De-Luxe Black Beauty.

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