

SoundLab Nº.2

New Vater Drumsticks

by David Weiss

Details, Details					
Model: Fusion	Model: Sweet Ride	Model: John Blackwell Matrix	Model: Josh Freese H-220	Model: Lil' John Roberts Philly Style	Model: Michael White's Pocket Monster
Wood: Sugar Maple	Wood: Sugar Maple	Wood: Hickory	Wood: Hickory	Wood: Hickory	Wood: Hickory
Tip: Nylon	Tip: Wood Ball	Tip: Wood Barrel	Tip: Wood Teardrop	Tip: Wood Acorn	Tip: Wood Barrel
Length: 16"	Length: 16"	Length: 16"	Length: 16"	Length: 16 1/8"	Length: 16"
Width: .580"	Width: .530"	Width: .570"	Width: .570"	Width: .555"	Width: .540"
List Price: \$11.85 (wood tip), \$12.30 (nylon tip)	List Price: \$11.85 (wood tip)	List Price: \$12.90 (wood tip)	List Price: \$12.90 (wood tip)	List Price: \$12.90 (wood tip)	List Price: \$12.90 (wood tip)

Different Strokes for Different Folks

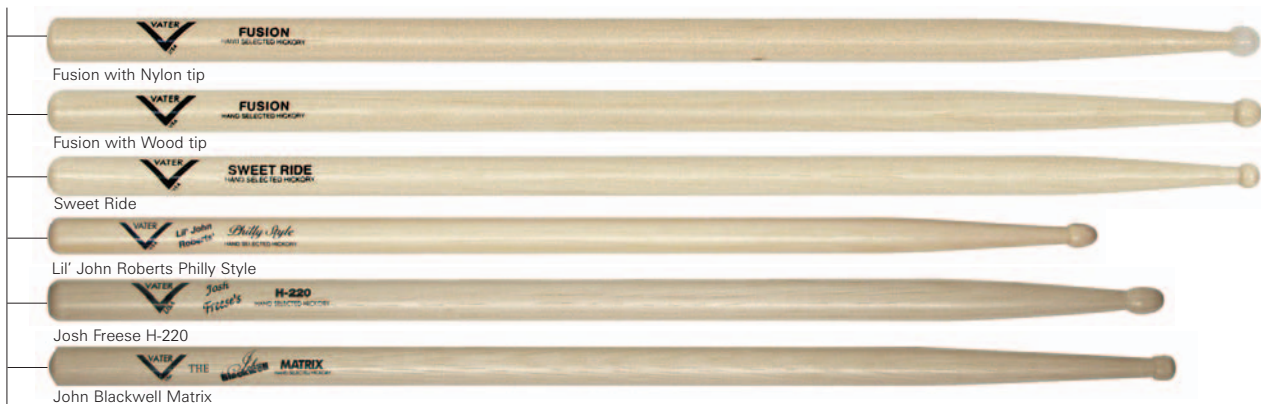
All right, choose your weapon. Like a chef's knife is for the chef, the drumsticks are the actual interface that the drummer engages to work his or her craft. Just like cooking, you can get away with only one implement if you have to, but it's really better to have a choice of tools to put in your hands and do the job.

Lots of drummers come to settle on a standard stick to do 90 percent of their work (if not 100 percent), but that can be a dull habit to fall into. Playing with a wider range of sticks can

needs. The findings that resulted opened my eyes to the fact that drumsticks are evolving nicely, and the wider variety of wood that I have in my stick bag, the better.

Vater sent me many more pairs of sticks than I could test for one article, so I ended up selecting six different kinds. To test each pair, I evaluated it on the following basic criteria by playing solo and with the music I thought was most appropriate for the stick:

Tip – the primary factor in shaping the sound the stick makes on drums and cymbals. Vater tip shapes include



not only open up new creative options and lead drummers to different avenues of expression, but help you get more from the skills you already have. New sticks are coming out all the time, and if you don't try something new at least once in a while, well, you may as well cook yourself a hamburger every night.

I was glad for the opportunity to try out the latest drumsticks being produced by Vater, a Massachusetts-based manufacturer and a relative newcomer on the scene since entering the mass market in 1990. The Vater 1A had been my own "standard" stick for a few years, and besides, it had been a frighteningly long time since I had actually taken my own advice (see above) and re-evaluated my own drumstick

teardrop, barrel, ball, acorn, and oval, and come in either nylon or wood varieties.

Wood – the main ingredient for determining a stick's response and durability. Vater uses either American hickory or sugar maple.

Length/thickness/shoulder/taper – the components that affect a stick's feel, balance and again, response.

Fusion. One nice thing about this, and all the pairs of sticks that I tested from Vater, is that they have names that actually give an indication of what they're designed for. I know the terms 1A or 5B mean something to someone, but I don't feel like going back to music school just to pick out a pair of drumsticks at the store.

The only nylon-tipped pair I tested, the Fusion sticks demonstrated a nice attack with brighter tones. Vater manufactures both hickory and maple versions of the Fusion model (in wood tip as well as nylon), and this pair was the latter. As the lighter of the two woods, a maple stick shines in music that calls for light, fast playing and lower volumes, and the Vater Fusion certainly reflected those characteristics. I thought the Fusion sticks were a good length and exhibited great balance. They felt short in a positive way (not stubby), and were bolstered by a slightly fat thickness, resulting in a good offset for the lively feel.

I chose to use these sticks playing along to some of my favorite Afro-Cuban music, and my feeling was that they felt very “drawn to the drum.” My precision on rolls improved noticeably and immediately, and I experienced small gains in speed and power. They caused very little hand fatigue, and made me feel in control of my strokes. For playing in precision situations, the Fusions were a joy to have in hand.

Sweet Ride. While heavy metal drummers might not want to wield a stick that includes the word “sweet” in its name, in fact, the nomenclature is very accurate. The ball tip generally produces a clean, bright, and well-articulated sound, and is definitely the point of this stick, which gets right to the heart of your ride cymbal’s character. I’m convinced that, until I put the Sweet Ride on its bell, that I had never really known the true tone and color of my long-held ride cymbal. I do now.

Also hewn from sugar maple, these sticks felt extremely light. Their long, thin design added to this effect and made them feel very lively. The extremely quick rebound that resulted took away from the balance of the stick, and made them slightly tricky to control if pushed too fast.

Besides delivering the truest tones possible from your ride cymbal, as well as providing terrific precision on both the hat and ride, another positive benefit of the Vater Sweet Ride is that it will encourage you to play your entire kit more lightly, if that’s what you want. A heavy foot would definitely overpower anything you did with your hands using these sticks, so if you’re a rock drummer looking for a way

to even out your dynamics in practice, they’ll be very good for you. If you’re a jazz drummer, you’ll probably just think they’re great in any situation.

John Blackwell Matrix. This pair comes from Vater’s Player Design series, created with input from the esteemed John Blackwell. Featuring a barrel tip, which usually gives sticks a full punch for extra loudness, the JB Matrix articulated evenly and actually sounded best to me when played at medium volume levels. Carved out of hickory, it had a very solid feel that helped for making heavier, stronger strokes.

Endowed with extra length and thickness, as well as a gradual taper, the JB Matrix has the right mix of ingredients for a great sense of strength and control. After laying into rock, hip-hop, and funk with these sticks, I concluded that they’re perfect for drummers who are in charge, but don’t necessarily need the spotlight. They have good tonal range, and especially when it comes to funk, they made for strong beats that landed with solidity. Just be careful — these sticks can make you sound good, but their accuracy can also magnify your mistakes!

Josh Freese H-220. Arguably one of the most prolific drummers of the last decade, Josh Freese has now produced a stick to go along with his lengthy discography. Made out of hickory and intentionally top-heavy due to a quick taper and heavy shoulder, these puppies felt solid, almost blunt. The teardrop-shaped tip pulled a slightly darker tone out of the drums and cymbals when whacked.

Something about these sticks feels like they’re just a hair shorter than normal, which probably contributes strongly to that blunt feel. An interesting result of this factor was that these sticks actually helped improve my posture, since the perceived reduction in length forced me to sit up on top of my drums in order to give them the full, confident strokes this stick was built for. They also felt like they came down with extra strength, and gave a controlled rebound.

All told, the JF H-220 encourages rock playing that’s strong, accurate, and direct. The slightly stocky feel can lead to some arm fatigue at first, which in turn may lead to some more good habits like economical playing. It felt really good to

hit along to stuff like Nirvana with these sticks.

Lil’ John Roberts Philly Style. I instantly bonded with this pair of hickory drumsticks designed with input from Lil’ John Roberts, whose credits include Janet Jackson and jazz legend George Duke. Created with comfort in mind, the Philly Style felt almost perfect in my hand, somehow matching weightiness with just the right length for a feel that managed to be both light and solid simultaneously. The acorn tip felt responsive, giving a full sound to drums and a slightly bright sheen to cymbals.

About 1/8" longer than the typical Vater stick, the extra length of the Philly Style acts as a sort of overdrive, serving up extra speed when you want it. Its long taper contributes to this stick’s great response and yummy rebound, giving it agility to match its speed.

It all adds up to a stick that is fun. Extremely versatile, the Philly Style was at home for styles ranging from world music to dance. Its extra-natural feel gave me confidence, encouraged creativity and somehow seemed to generate musical ideas all by itself. This stick is extremely well conceived and executed.

Michael White’s Pocket Monster. Thank garsh I took Michael White’s Pocket Monster for a spin. Most of the time I feel like I’m faking it in funk groove styles, but the Pocket Monster finally helped me figure it out. Made of hickory, it felt solid, strong, and stout. It’s an average length, but felt a tiny bit short due to a heavy shoulder, relative thinness, and perfectly weighted response.

The barrel shaped tip is slightly rounded and feels like it “digs” ever so slightly into the surface of the drum of cymbal — the slight drag that results from impact slows your stroke a tick and pulls it right into the pocket. It also has a very controlled rebound. All this great feedback makes it easy to separate ghost notes from primary hits, for easily varied funk feels. I thought this was a very well thought-out stick, as well.

Verdict. This is a versatile collection of drumsticks. Overall, it was a solid showing from Vater, and a positive indication of where drumsticks are heading. 🖐️