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Schlepping a la Butch

By Butch Norton



GO EASY ON YOURSELF

The pleasure that we derive from being drummers comes in many forms. A rousing round of applause from an audience after you've laid down a solid performance, a "thumbs up" from the engineer or producer in the control room as you've given them "The Take" that they were looking for, a student grasps a concept and applies it to the instrument for the first time, and a simple solo moment when you master that lick, a passage, or musical challenge that you've been chipping away at on your own. It's a beautiful thing.

The down side to all of this is the grueling reality of dealing with the construction and physical movement of our setups and gear.

Many have written, in this magazine and others, about their perspectives on gear "and being prepared," and all of them have given us food for thought. I learn something new every time I read these articles (and I've been doing this for over 47 years). If it works for somebody else, it might work for you.

Today I want to give you a few practical pointers on "The schlepping of a small house" otherwise known as your drum set.

When we first fantasized about the drum set and saw our heroes thrashing and soaring around the kit, it didn't register that the rest of our lives would be spent figuring out how to make all this shit fit into our lives (and that your sideline career would be that of a MOVER!). We are the first to a gig and the last to leave. If I hear "don't you wish you played the flute?" one more time I'm gonna hurl.

I accept my fate. I understand that all these other instrumentalists are all wimps, and that I truly "suffer for my art" because I want to bring that extra awesome piece of gear that will make the band or session sound AMAZING.

My first piece of advice is to get a good pair of gloves. (ex. 1 & 2)

Spend the extra cash and get serious work gloves. Don't get the cheaper cloth gardening ones. They won't last.

Remember the last time you retracted that cymbal stand and the tubing slipped so fast that a piece of the meat on your hand got pinched in between the two pieces of metal? Remember how during the gig you felt that annoying stinging pain in your hand? Remember the blood blister, or annoying cut, that wouldn't go away for weeks? Get some gloves.

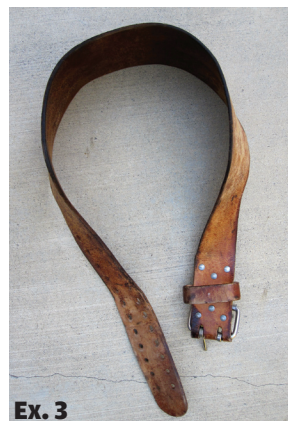
NEXT: get a weight belt (ex. 3). I know...it looks silly. You'll get a lot of grief and fellow musicians saying "really?" but you won't strain your back.

I've had this leather one for twenty years and it has saved a lot of wear and tear on my back. Look at the manly sweat stain from all of my toil and labor on the back of the belt (ex. 4). This also helps perpetuate the "drummer as a Neanderthal" stereotype, which keeps young children from coming up and asking if they can hit my drums at certain gigs.

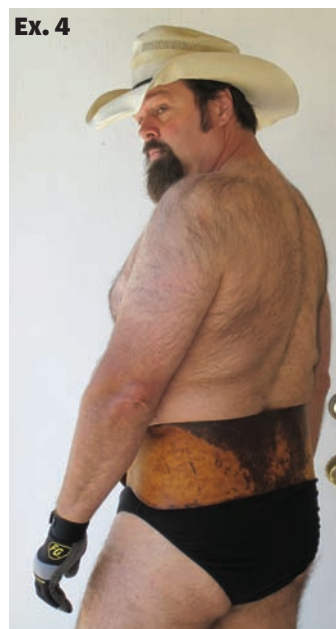
They have all sorts of ones now with braces, lighter-weight material, and straps and trusses to help support your back and shoulders. It is cheaper and less painful than BACK surgery. My dad had discs removed in the '70s—he still doesn't have full feeling in his left leg. If nothing else the belt is a constant reminder, to you, to utilize the proper mechanics of your legs and lower body when lifting and to not to bend from the waist.



Ex. 1 & 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4

Ex. 5



The next piece of essential equipment is a HAND TRUCK or CART.

There are many different types, but the best ones have air in the tires and can carry a heavy load over many terrains. This particular one will also extend out another two feet and can be configured in different positions (ex. 5 & 6).

Check the weight rating of each cart. Get one that exceeds the amount of weight you are transporting. I used to carry each of my cases from the car to the bandstand. It took forever and I was beat from all the extra work.

Ex. 6



THINK SMARTER

Before I move or lift one piece of gear I go survey the "landscape." Where will I be setting up? What is the easiest path to my destination? Can I get my vehicle any closer to the stage or studio, and can I park it there? Can I use my cart? Will anybody be able to help carry some gear? Do I need to bring my carpet in? Will I be able to use my entire kit or do I need to trim it back? Where is the bass player? Is he going to show up at the last minute and leave immediately after the last note? Will he make it home before I finish loading my van?

THE GOAL IS TO MAKE IT EASIER ON YOURSELF AND YOUR BODY. You're already going to be expending more energy than anybody else, so minimize the workload.

And here is my sweet vehicle of schlep-age. The 1994 Chevy Astro Van with 235,000 miles, all mine (ex. 7).



Ex.7

None of my children, or Mrs. Butch, will be seen riding in this carriage. They do not acknowledge my existence when I'm out and about in it. There has been a time or two when I have honked the horn to get my child's attention, and they have ignored me.

It can travel in any "seedy" alleyway, park behind any hotel, studio, or club (I do get asked to park it in the back lot with the "help" at country clubs) and not be bothered.

The amount of space in this baby is unparalleled.

Taking out the seats I have gotten a 26" and 29" set of timpani, a 32" concert bass drum, a five-piece drum kit with hardware, four bags of cymbals, eight bags of various percussion toys and gadgets, a set of congas, timbales, bongos, and a 20" Taiko drum with room for stick bags and a few spare snare drums (ex. 8 & 9).

BUTCH'S BLOCK



Ex. 8



Ex. 9

SCHLEPPING IS A BITCH

But it's ultimately the coolest thing in the world to be a drummer. I wouldn't change any of it. The most rewarding and creative aspect is that "my" kit/setup is completely unique to me, and only me. The design, the sound: no other instrumentalist can make this statement. Embrace your uniqueness. Let everyone experience your creation.

I may bitch at the end of the day but I still remember: IT'S ALL GOOD (ex. 10).



Ex. 10

Contact me anytime.

WEBFOOT

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