

# Novation Launchpad | £149

**Martin Delaney** wonders if Novation's Launchpad is a 'me too' machine, or a viable Ableton Live controller



## WHAT IS IT?

Ableton Live-focused controller which concentrates on the basics of clip launching (and squeezes in some useful mixer functions).

## CONTACT

Who: Novation  
Tel: +44 1494 462246  
Web: [novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 8x8 beats 8x5
- 2 USB bus-powered
- 3 Small size means portability, and hand-held clip launch bliss

Only a few months after its release, Akai's APC40 dominates the Ableton Live controller scene,

demolishing both cheaper and far more expensive rivals. Many Live users see the APC as the de facto must-have Live controller. And why not? It's endorsed by Ableton, and it works brilliantly well.

Having said that, it was just a matter of

time before somebody else had a go, and Novation are good for it, being creators of some of the best hardware controllers around. And being Ableton's UK distributors helps too!

The package includes the Launchpad, a neat right-angle USB cable, and installers for Live 8 Launchpad Edition, USB drivers and Novation's Automap software. An 8x8

grid of pads is mainly used for Live Session View clip launching, with another eight function buttons at the top, and eight more at the right.

Surprisingly, the Launchpad's plastic case hasn't been designed to blend in with the silver trim of Novation's updated SL series of controllers.

## Ground control

Once the software installs are completed, and the Launchpad has been set up in Live's Preferences, a red rectangle appears on Live's Session View, showing the clips currently active on the Launchpad. Flip into Arrangement View, and the tracks are also highlighted – this is exactly the same way the APC40 works, though the Launchpad highlights 64 at a time instead of the APC's 40.

When you have a Live set with some clips loaded in Session View, press the Session button at the top of the Launchpad, and the multicoloured LEDs come to life. Pads light amber to show a





clip is present in that slot, green to show a playing clip, red to show recording. Tap a pad to launch a clip (I recommend tinkering with clip launch options for the most interactive results), or use the buttons at the right to launch scenes – horizontal rows of clips in Live.

The arrow buttons at the top let you 'nudge' the clip focus up/down/left/right. Hold down the Session button for an overview of your set – an amber pads indicates the currently active block,

– if I can't record velocities from pads, I'd rather just draw the parts in. I built a Live rack that remapped the Launchpad notes to ascend chromatically from bottom left pad to top left pad, and added Live's Scale MIDI device, so I could play synth parts that conformed to a particular scale. User 2 isn't set to anything by default – Novation suggest using it for Max For Live presets, but MFL isn't even out yet, so you might find some other use for it – I mapped it

and if you're hand-holding the Launchpad it means you don't have to grab a mixer or a mouse. The Mixer button itself shows an overview of all these parameters but I found it took a while to orient myself – 'that light means what?'. The only things I missed were a default control for master volume, and maybe another send – I'd give up the User 2 page for that or, even better, have Send A respond to eight sends for one track, rather than one send for eight tracks (you can use Live's MIDI mapping and the Automap software to create your own setups).

### Get your clips out

Though I'd love to see Novation create a full SL-style controller with pads instead of a keyboard, maybe it's good that the Launchpad avoids direct competition with the APC40, and gives us more choice – at a very reasonable price too.

It lacks the 'big hitter' feel of the APC, and I missed the direct device control that the Akai machine offers, but the Launchpad is a different animal – larger pads, more clips available at once, smaller size, USB bus-power and hand-held operation.

It's also friendly towards other applications, through the Automap software – and if you upgrade to Automap Pro, the pads can even be used to send keyboard shortcuts. The Launchpad fits great with Live, to the point where you miss it when it's not around, and it's impossible to leave it on a desk – it begs to be picked up and handled. If you consider that you can nab a Launchpad and a Nocturn for just over £200, the control options are immense for the price. And as a mobile, solution for Ableton Live, it comes highly recommended. **FM**

## It's almost impossible to leave the Launchpad on a desk – it begs to be picked up and handled

green represents ones containing playing clips, and red means no clips playing. There are also two User pages: User 1 defaults to the notes required for Live's drum racks – upwards from the bottom of column one to the top of column four, then from the bottom of column five up to the top of column eight – I didn't take to this, especially as the Launchpad isn't velocity-sensitive

so the top row of buttons were activating audio effects.

### Grid jockey

Press the Mixer button, then one of the right-hand buttons to change volume, pan, and send A/B levels, or to stop clips, or activate, solo, and arm tracks. Changing parameters from the pads is a low-res experience, but it still works,

### APC40? Launchpad? Or Both?

Choices will be based on budget, portability and existing gear – but if you can't decide – maybe you could try using both! If you have the Akai APC

configured within Live's Preferences, then you can add the Launchpad, and configure it as a second Control Surface. Whichever way round you

do it, the first controller displays the usual red rectangle and the second gets a yellow rectangle – these can be moved around the screen as usual, with the relevant hardware's scroll controls. I'd guess a third one gets another colour rectangle – I just don't have enough of them to find out! Why you'd do this is another question, but with customisation options like Max For Live there'll be a lot of possibilities.



### SPECS

**Physical:** 8x8 grid of illuminated pads for Live Session View clip launching, 8 further control buttons at top and right. USB connector at top right of unit.

#### Interface:

**Layers:** Session, User 1, User 2, Mixer, Volume, Pan, Send A, Send B.

#### System requirements:

**PC:** Windows XP or Vista, 1.5GHz or faster, 512MB RAM.

**Mac:** OS X 10.4 or later, G4 or Intel, 512MB RAM.

#### Compatibility:

Ableton Live, and any other Automap-friendly audio software, including Logic, Reason, Pro Tools, etc.

#### Software:

Ableton Live Launchpad Edition, Novation USB drivers, and Automap software included.

#### Accessories:

L-shaped USB cable included. Padded carry sleeve also available.

#### Dimensions:

**240x20x240 mm**

#### Weight:

**717g**

### ALTERNATIVES



#### Akai APC40

**£399**

The APC40 is viewed by many as 'the' Live controller – trading off size, price, and mains power against more tactile controls.

[akaiapro.com](http://akaiapro.com)



#### Novation Zero SL

**£330**

Novation's own SL range is still among the top Ableton Live controllers. They also have the advantage of being fully functional with other software.

[novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)



#### iTouchMIDI apps on iPhone/iPod Touch

**£3.49 each**

Get a smell of the future with the iTouchMIDI apps for iPhone and iPod Touch.

[apple.com/iphone/apps-for-iphone](http://apple.com/iphone/apps-for-iphone)

### FutureMusic VERDICT

#### BUILD

★★★★★

#### VALUE

★★★★★

#### EASE OF USE

★★★★★

#### VERSATILITY

★★★★★

#### RESULTS

★★★★★

The Launchpad holds its own by following a different path. Highly recommended.