

Akai MPC 5000 | £1,549

All hail the MPC 5000, new flagship of the MPC range. But does it live up to the legacy of its forefathers? **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** gets his swing on...

WHAT IS IT?

The new flagship MPC with virtual analogue synth and arpeggiator, 8-track hard disk recording, USB 2.0, expanded sampling, filters and effects.

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Large screen for detailed editing/navigation
- 2 Deep sample editing
- 3 New workhorse synth

The MPC range has been evolving since the release of the MPC 60 in 1988.

Designed by Roger Linn and

Akai, the MPC 60 mk 1 and 2 and the 3000 became legends in their own right and still have a loyal following, due to their heavy and sometimes grungy sound, bouncy, laid back, swing quantise/sequencer feel and efficient workflow.

Later, Akai parted company with Roger Linn and went on to produce the 2000, 2000 XL, 4000, 1000, 500 and 2500. However, many felt that the Roger Linn designed models still sounded the best for grungy and punchy/swaggering beats while the

MPC 4000 is highly regarded as the most fully-featured and hi-definition MPC ever. The 4000 has now been discontinued and has hung up its flagship crown, but can the new MPC 5000 improve and build on its fine reputation?

Acclaimed Akai

There is no mistaking that the MPC 5000 is an MPC through and through, and, I think, the best looking yet. It's well laid out, though its footprint is large, so don't expect to be taking this particular MPC onto a train or plane. Also, it can't be run on batteries.

The front panel is a tale of two worlds. The first is the legacy left by Roger Linn and the original Akai company – note repeat button, transport controls, data wheel and more importantly, the 16 velocity sensitive square pads which are the key to inputting note data (unless you are inputting notes via a MIDI



Synth and Arp

Synth and arpeggiator buttons enable these new built-in features

Functions

Function buttons and window button (under screen) for accessing menu pages and for more detailed editing

Pads

Feel as great as ever, and are great for inputting drums and changing modes. New cycle and random trigger modes too

Expansion

CD-R/DVD drive slot. Install the optional drive here

Storage

CF card reader: accepts up to 2Gb cards for storage

Transport

Transport/record/overdub controls – the hub of the MPC 5000 sequencer

Jacks

Footswitch jacks and headphone out are front-mounted for easy access

The Onboard Synth and Arpeggiator



The onboard synth and arpeggiator are exclusive to the MPC 5000 in the current MPC range. The synth is a comprehensive 20-voice, 3-VCO virtual analogue beast, that includes editable parameters such as cross modulation, Ring Mod, 2 MIDI-syncable LFOs, envelopes, stereo spread, panning, various wave types, PWM and white noise.

As a bonus the pads now also have aftertouch that can be

assigned to various synth parameters including filter cutoff or pitch mod. Both poly and mono modes are available with legato and while playing the synth from the pads is fun, connecting an external keyboard unlocks its real potential. The synth can be routed through the onboard filters, effects and arpeggiator, which is useful and includes five pattern modes and a latch for hands-free arpeggiating.

keyboard) and now also double as mode changing buttons, which help speed up workflow considerably.

The second world is Numark's, who have owned Akai Pro since 2004. The screen, which is very similar to the MPC 4000, is much larger, is easy-on-

the-eye and facilitates grid/sample waveform editing – this MPC is much easier to program than its smaller screened siblings.

The Q-link controls have been greatly expanded compared to the 2500 and 4000 and can be assigned

Internally, this MPC works in a similar way to older models but the software has been expanded. It comes with a (poor!) 64Mb sample memory expandable to 192Mb via the optional expansion board (though the MPC 4000 could take 512Mb). There is

also the option to install a CD-R/DVD drive, though I think this should be standard at this price.

The beat-making process is essentially the

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same as other MPC's but beats can now be layered with synth sounds or audio. Plug a sound source into the analogue/SPDIF inputs or phono preamp, sample in mono or stereo directly onto the in-built 80Gb hard drive, load your samples into a program, assign to the pads (up to 4 samples can be assigned to a pad but now also cycle-triggered and randomised) and away you go.

Simult mode enables four pads to be triggered by one pad, while internal resampling with effects is also possible and samples can be loaded/saved to the memory card or hard disk. You can also connect the MPC to your DAW via USB and drag samples forward/back between the DAW and the MPC. This is one pretty big productivity advantage over the older MPC's.

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Chop Shop

Sample editing is comprehensive. Chop Shop v2.0 allows Recycle-type sample treatment, automatically chopping your sample into slices and assigning the samples to the pads, while creating a new program. Single hits or phrases can be chopped from a continuous WAV file, organised and

Mute

Track mute button for muting a pad, a track or groups of tracks together

Memory loss

General workflow is superb, mainly helped by the panel layout and screen. It's great having the pads in the middle and the Q-link controls to the left so you can hit the pads and tweak parameters in real time with your left hand. In essence, anyone already familiar with older MPC's will feel at home instantly and new users will be flying around in no time – this is what the MPC range is all about.

My only beef with the external design is the plasticky feel of the armrest and side panels. The rubberised soft armrest on my MPC 3000 still reigns supreme!

SPECS

General

Display: 240 x 128 dot graphic LCD w/backlight

Memory Card Slot: Compact Flash (from 32Mb to 2Gb)

Sound Generator

Sampling rate: 44.1kHz

Memory capacity: 64Mb standard, expandable to 192Mb

Recording time: 12m 48sec (64Mb, mono), 38m 24sec (192Mb, mono)

Memory expansion slot: 1 x for optional EXM-E3

Data format: 16-bit linear

Polyphony: 64 notes

Dynamic filtering: 1 State Variable Filter per voice

Filter types: Low-pass, band-pass, high-pass, band-boost, band stop, analogue modeling

Preset sound memory: 16Mb

Number of programs: 128

Effects

Effects: 4 stereo busses with two stereo effects per buss, and master effect

Master effect: 4 band EQ, compressor

Sequencer

Maximum events: 100,000 notes

Resolution: 960 parts per 1/4-note

Sequences: 99

Tracks per sequence: 64

MIDI output channels: 64 (16 channels x 4 outputs)

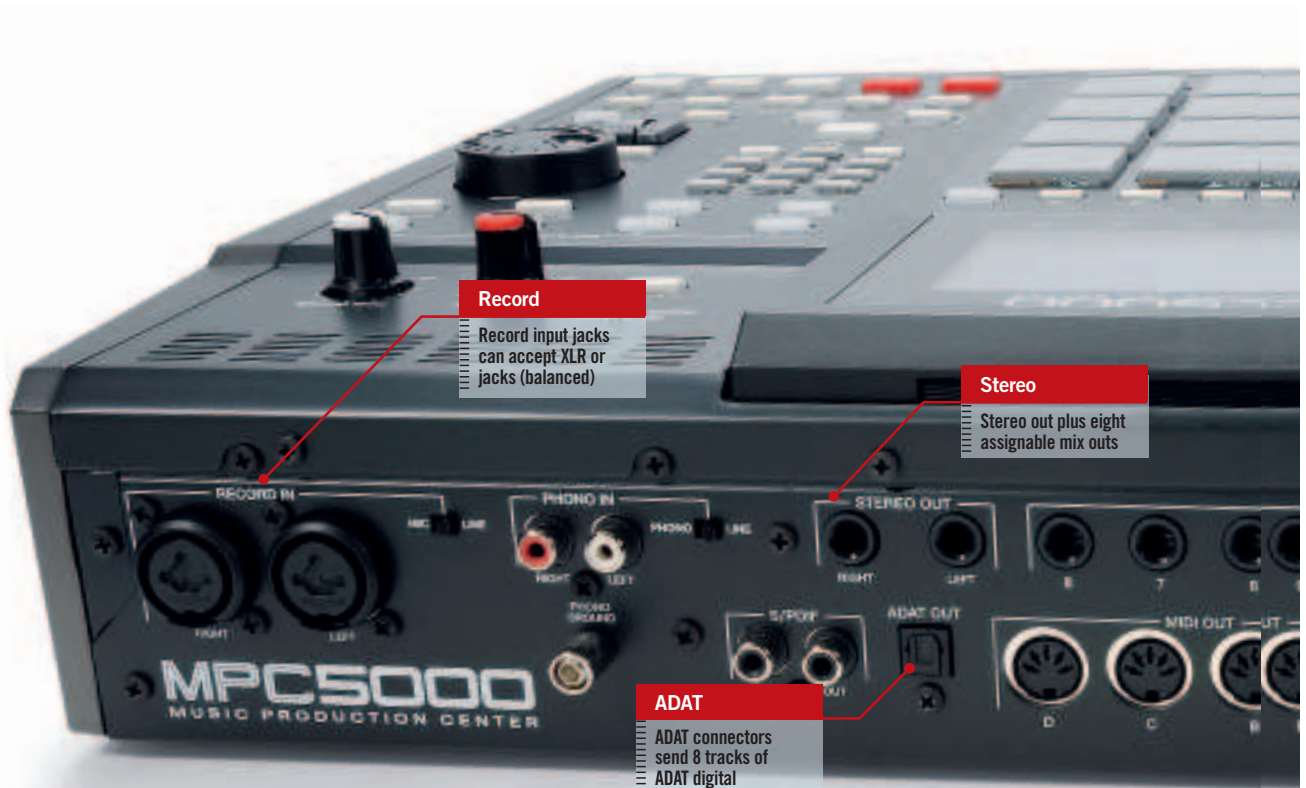
Song mode: 20 songs, 250 steps per song

Drum pad: 16 (velocity and pressure sensitive)

Drum pad banks: 4

Sync mode: MIDI clock, MIDI Time Code

Transport Controls: MIDI Machine Control



manipulated into a new beat. This is a fantastic feature that I wish my 3000 had. Samples can also be pitch-shifted and timestretched using 18 special algorithms. Audio is

outputted via 10 balanced jack outs, ADAT (8 channels) or SPDIF. Sequencing is fully featured on the 5000. A sequence can contain any type of MIDI event (synth/drum/MIDI)

and can be edited in fine detail in step edit mode or via the piano roll/DAW-like grid editor which is a bonus, though a mouse input/VGA output would have made it even better (like the Roland MV-8800). Each sequence can have up to 64 tracks and sequences can be easily chained together in song mode into a song form/arrangement. Whole tracks can now be assigned/triggered or muted by one or more pads (groups) in the track mute screen, which is amazing for live use. The sequencer also has a resolution of 960 parts per 1/4 note which is the best in the current range and the same as the outgoing 4000.

The Good and Great

Akai's MPC 5000 introduces some fantastic new features...



> The workflow is slick with a tried and tested interface – large screen, Q-link controls and tactile velocity-sensitive pads. Beat making is just more fun with an MPC!

> The synth, arp, effects, envelopes and filters mean that this could be the only VA synth you'll ever need and the Q-link controls bring many of these new features to life.



> You can plug in a mic, instrument or record deck and lay down up to 8 tracks of audio in realtime, with EQ and effects. Additionally, any external source can be routed through the effects, filters and processed.

Bit-rate reduction

You'll be glad to hear the much-debated swing-quantise function is still fully intact, now with added strength and triplet parameters and the sequencer feels tight and accurate, though in direct comparison, my beloved MPC 3000 still has the edge both in terms of sonic punch and feel/swing. A useful new feature called Continuous Sample Tracks ensures that long samples start from the correct point in their cycle each time play is pressed, so no more waiting for the measure to come back round before the sample re-triggers.

A significant downside with the 5000 is that the sample rate is fixed at 16-bit 44.1khz. Most people now



MIDI
MIDI ins and five MIDI outs for linking to external MIDI gear

USB
USB2 connection for fast file transfer between your MPC and your DAW

SPECS

- Inputs/Outputs**
Record input (L and R): Mic/1/4-inch combo x 2 balanced -40dBu, input impedance 11k ohms – RCA with phono preamp
Max. Input level: +10dBu digital – RCA-pin x 1 SPDIF
Stereo output (L and R): 1/4-inch phone x 2 balanced +11dBu, output impedance 1k
Max. output level: +22dBu
8 individual outputs: 1/4-inch phone x 8 balanced +11dBu, output impedance 1k Ohms
Max. output level: +22dBu
Phones output: 1/4-inch stereo phone x 1, 200mW/100 ohms
Digital output: RCA-pin and SPDIF, ADAT optical
MIDI inputs: 5-pin DIN x 2
MIDI outputs: 5-pin DIN x 4
USB: Slave connector x 1, USB Mass Storage Class support
Footswitches: 1/4-inch x 2
- Options**
EXM-E3: 128MB expansion memory card (192MB total)
CDM-25: CD-R/DVD Drive
- Dimensions**
406 x 408 x 86mm
- Weight:**
18.2 lbs

work at 24-bit in their DAW's and the extra digital headroom definitely would benefit the HD recording, beats and synth/effects and make for a more open sound. It's strange Akai have chosen a 16-bit upper limit, especially considering their own MPC 4000 was full 24/96kHz capable.

The MPC 5000 allows 8 tracks of live audio to be recorded/streamed from/to its hard drive and this can be added to a song and edited (but not with quite the ease DAW users are used to). Recording time is only limited by the size of the internal 80gb hard drive but unfortunately you

can't currently record or stream to/from an external USB hard drive which is a big missed opportunity. Audio can be edited, automated/panned in the track mixer and mixed down with effects/mastering. This allows complete songs with beats, synths, effects and audio to be finished and mixed within the MPC and burned to CD/DVD (if installed).

Sound-wise, the 5000 sounds great for drums in particular and is clear, wide and

punchy but the synth can sound slightly harsh/grainy in the mid/hi-mid range at times, (though the effects/EQ/compression can temper this and are a very useful addition). However, I did notice some aliasing on the tails of certain delays and also stepping/quantisation while using the filter. This is disappointing, though the synth certainly adds to the MPC's viability as one-stop production centre.

The MPC strikes a good balance between old and new, both in terms of sound, looks and features



Note repeat
Hit this classic MPC key for quick and easy creation of rolls and fast hat patterns

MPC Conclusion

All in all, I do like the 5000 and while it's lacking some features from Akai's last flagship MPC, it strikes a good balance between MPC's of old and new, both in terms of sound, looks and features. Plus it's great to have all the extra real-time control, the hard disk

ALTERNATIVES



Roland MV-8800

£1349

Roland's version of the MPC with pads, hard disk recording and effects. A mouse and external monitor can also be connected to make editing a breeze.

roland.co.uk



Apple Macbook + Logic Express + Apogee Duet + Akai MPD32

approx. £1546

The nearest equivalent DAW setup. Computer-based and can be added to as required with better conversion, bigger screen, more upgradeability plus you can surf the net! Not an all-in-one solution though and doesn't have the MPC mojo!

apple.com/uk



Akai MPC 4000 Plus

approx. £800

The outgoing Akai flagship. 24/96 capable rather than 16-bit 44.1, with keygrouping, Aksys editing software but no synth, arpeggiator or hard disk streaming. Can be bagged second hand for cheaper.

akaiopro.com

recording, synth/arp, effects, fast USB 2.0 and sequence grid/sample waveform editing on a larger screen.

At this price though and as the current flagship MPC, I really think it

should have a 24-bit sample engine and a DVD/CD-R burner as standard, and improved polyphony/RAM capability. Also, the keygroup function on the 4000 that allowed multi-

sampled instruments to be imported, appears to have been lost, which is a real shame, as is the loss of Aksys DAW editing support. It's as if Akai are giving up 'high end' features in favour of more, raw, sound-producing options.

While this MPC is more than worthy of wearing the MPC badge, the loss of 24-bit capability alone means that most dedicated MPC 4000 users will be hanging on to theirs for dear life – or at least until a similarly high digitally specced MPC 6000 arrives. As good as the 5000's new features are, in terms of digital recording this feels more like an MPC 3500 next to the spec of the outgoing flagship.

However, for those that don't use or own computers (or simply don't like computers) and those that love the MPC concept, the 5000 is a hard to beat all-in-one box that still really can do the lot. Check it out. **FM**

Effects and Filters

The effects in the MPC 5000 are similar in structure to the outgoing MPC 4000 (albeit 16-bit not 24-bit). There are four

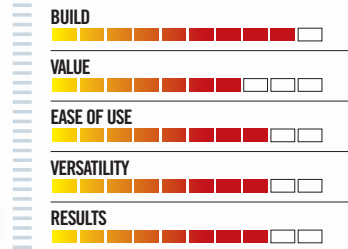
stereo effect busses and each buss can have two effects. Pads can be routed to separate effects and have their own send/

mix levels, while each buss can also be assigned to one of the 10 outputs. There are 49 effect types including distortions, wahs, flangers, delays, reverbs, a bit-cruncher, compressors and EQ.

The onboard filter is a multimode resonant type with LFO and its own envelope and includes modelled lo/hi/band-pass and formant types. The filters sounds good but there is still audible stepping, particularly those with high resonance.



FutureMusic VERDICT



A worthy and versatile addition. For those that like everything in one box, the 5000 is hard to beat.



Screen
Large tilt-able screen that's easy on the eye for those long sessions!

Q-link controls
Q-link controls: 8 rotaries and 4 sliders that link to various parameters or can control other midi gear