

Mac PC What is it? Intelligent-mapping MIDI control surface **PRICE: £229**

CONTACT: Novation, 01494 462246 WWW.novationmusic.com



▲ Look, ma, no keys! There's no X/Y pad either, unfortunately

NOVATION ReMOTE SL ZeRO

Craving Novation's Automap technology but don't need another set of keys? Then read on...

► SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac or PC with a USB port

► TEST SYSTEM

MacBook Pro Core Duo 2GHz, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4.7

► ALTERNATIVELY

Mackie Control C4

cm95 » 8/10 » £799

It's not as compact as the SL ZeRO, but the Mackie is great for controlling your plug-ins

Behringer BCF2000

cm78 » 9/10 » £180

Long, motorised faders make this one ideal for mixing purposes

Back in cm99 we reviewed the ReMOTE SL 61 controller keyboard and gave it a big thumbs up, despite a few teething problems with some of the new technology that Novation employed. Since then, software support for the device has been improved, and a keyboard-less version has just been launched: the ReMOTE SL ZeRO. How does this stack up against its more expensive cousin and who in particular might consider buying it?

The control panel on the ZeRO is basically identical to the one on the SL keyboard units. However, it is missing the pitchbend/modulation joystick and X/Y touchpad. Fortunately, the ZeRO is significantly cheaper than the keyboard versions; it represents excellent value for money.

Physically, the unit is about the right size to fit into a 19" rack, but it actually sits on your desk. It can be inclined to improve control access and visibility of the two large LCD displays.

The story so far

For the benefit of those who missed the original review, we should say that the ReMOTE SL (Soft Label) series' main selling point is its Automap technology. This automatically maps software parameters onto the control surface, and labels them onto the pair of LCD screens. Automap is supported in Logic Pro, Cubase SX, Nuendo, Ableton Live and Reason. Support in Reason has always been first class, but it's recently been improved in the other four applications. It does still have some limitations, however – see the *Mapping for the future* boxout for more on this. In most supported applications it's possible to navigate between different bits of software from the SL hardware, but a flick through the electronic documentation might be required to find out how.

The SL ZeRO excels at controlling software that doesn't map nicely onto conventional synth controls – it's great when you're working with effects

plug-ins, for example. The LCD labelling is very useful, though the sliders a tad short for full-scale mixing duties.

The SL ZeRO will appeal most to those who already own a controller keyboard, use one of the supported applications and want to enjoy the speed and convenience of Automap technology (which continues to mature nicely). However, if you want a more integrated and compact setup and really must have the X/Y touchpad, you should plump for one of the standard models. **cm**

VERDICT

FOR

- + Software support improved
- + Automap is a great concept
- + Good (electronic) documentation
- + Good value for money

AGAINST

- No X/Y pad
- No power supply included

If you already own a keyboard and can live without an X/Y touchpad, the SL ZeRO is an (almost) perfect control surface solution

RATING



Mapping for the future

Automap is a fantastic idea, but in certain circumstances it doesn't work as well as you'd hope. You can feel a bit lost trying to control an instrument that has a large number of parameters – for example, Albino 3 uses 118 pages! We should point out that this has nothing to do with Novation's technology – it's a consequence of the

way VST and AU plug-ins work; but still, it can be frustrating.

One workaround involves switching to a dedicated template, but this goes against the whole Automap concept. However, it's difficult to see how Novation could improve matters – so just be aware that this sort of situation can arise when using certain software.



▲ 118 pages of controls – blimey!