



What is it? Guitarist-friendly keyboard/audio interface

PRICE: £259

CONTACT: Line 6, 01327 302700

WWW.line6.com

INFO: Plug-in upgrade, \$200

LINE 6 TonePort KB37

Tasty tones, an audio interface, controllers and keys: is this the ultimate production package for technology-savvy guitarists?



► SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: Pentium 4 1.2GHz, (2.5GHz recommended), 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), Windows XP (SP2), 1GB free hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, internet connection for online features, USB port (USB hubs are not supported)

Mac: G4 1.25GHz (1.67GHz recommended – Power PC and Intel processor systems are supported), 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), OS X 10.4.6, 1GB free hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, internet connection for online features, USB port (USB hubs are not supported)

► TEST SYSTEM

PC: Athlon 2700+, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

► ALTERNATIVELY

M-Audio Ozonic

cm84 » 9/10 » £349
37-key MIDI controller that features an audio interface and 40 fully assignable controllers

Native Instruments Guitar Rig 2

cm95 » 9/10 » £350
There's no keyboard, but NI's package offers great tone generation software and a fine foot controller

For many recording guitarists, the keyboard is a necessary evil.

Conscious of this, Line 6 have created the KB37 – a controller keyboard and audio interface that comes cunningly disguised as a piece of 1960s studio-ware.

You'll either love or hate the design of this thing... and we happen to love it. The flowing retro lines draw your fingers to the control surface and the build quality is very good. The plastic casing offers a resilience that belies its light weight and the rotary controls operate smoothly, while offering the right amount of resistance.

The three octaves of keys have a smooth 'synth' action and feature a single, middle-of-the-road velocity curve that gives decent playability of most instruments. It's a shame that no alternative curves are offered, however.

The range is expanded by the Octave Select buttons, offering three octaves up/down. For info on the other controllers, see the *On the turn* boxout.

The audio interface element of the KB37 is similar in functionality to that

of the Line 6 UX2. Two microphone inputs are provided (with phantom power) as well as two line inputs, a stereo monitor input, an expression pedal, two footswitch inputs and an instrument input complete with pad. In the other direction, there are two analogue outs and S/PDIF stereo out.

Also onboard are two bona fide VU meters. These indicate input, send, monitor or output levels depending on what you select in the software.

Guitar tone generation is handled by Line 6's GearBox software. We reviewed the plug-in version of this in **cm108**, awarding it 8/10. The version here, however, is standalone, though you can pay to upgrade if you want plug-in functionality. Included are 18 guitar amp, five bass amp, six preamp and 30 effect models. Plenty more can be bought as add-ons from the Line 6 website. The models sound sublime – some truly breathtaking sounds can be found in the presets alone. From a production point of view, all bases are covered, with the mic preamp models being a particularly excellent resource.

All in one

The KB37 is a great multitasker, coming in handy for guitar, bass, vocal and keyboard recordings. What's more, its compact size and light weight make it ideal for carting around with a laptop.

If the KB37 came with the plug-in version of GearBox, it would receive very high marks. As it stands, however, there's no way of altering sounds once they're recorded – a major drawback.

Redemption, however, comes in the form of incredible ease of use and very high quality sounds, and these features ensure that the KB37 emerges as another fine Line 6 product. **cm**

VERDICT

FOR

- + Decent keyboard
- + Great sounds
- + Quality audio interface
- + Covers all bases
- + Hands-on control of software amp parameters

AGAINST

- Can't use software as a plug-in
- Only one velocity curve option
- Could use a couple more rotary controllers

Despite a few limitations, the KB37 is a very tempting proposition for new-to-computer-recording guitarists to consider

RATING



On the turn

Four rotary encoders sit on the top surface of the KB37, each with a momentary button underneath it. You can assign these to any parameters you like in your sequencer, but in the GearBox software they're assigned automatically.

By default, the encoders adjust the first four controls of your selected amp. However, each encoder can easily be assigned to any GearBox control using the drop-down menus in the MIDI control settings dialogue.

Everything works very well, but you're left hankering for more encoders. It's annoying to be able to adjust, say, drive, bass, low-mid and high-mid using the KB37's controls, but then have to grab the mouse just to adjust the treble.

By default, the momentary buttons switch effect modules on and off. From left to right, they operate the stomp box, modulation, delay and reverb. Again, though, these can be assigned to whatever you like.

Another nice touch comes in the form of the sound select buttons, which enable you to quickly and easily scroll through presets.



▲ The KB37's controllers can tweak the GearBox sound – to a degree, anyway