

Mac PC
What is it? Integrated hardware/software DJ system
PRICE: £459

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# M-AUDIO Torq Xponent

M-Audio have come up with an eye-catching control surface to complement their Torq software, but can these virtual wheels of steel make the grade?

► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

**PC:** P4 1.4GHz (or equivalent), 512MB RAM, Windows XP SP2, free USB port  
**Mac:** G4 1.5GHz, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, free USB port

► **TEST SYSTEM**

**PC:** AMD Athlon XP2500+, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

**On the DVD**

**AUDIO DEMOS**  
**DemoA:** Filters. **DemoB:** Effects. **DemoC** and **DemoD:** Scratching and general use

**I**t appears that the SynchroScience Design Group at M-Audio consulted beings from a distant planet – or, at the very least, the attendees of a *Star Trek* convention – while designing their new Xponent DJ control surface, which also comes complete with the ready-configured Torq software. The system may have a quasi-futuristic look to it, but is this DJing package really light years ahead of today's standards?

M-Audio's Torq software has been around for quite some time, but this is the first time it's been bundled with a MIDI DJ controller, and with Xponent doubling as an audio interface, this

should be all you need to get Dling in the digital domain. We found setup to be a breeze, and computer connection couldn't be simpler, requiring just a USB cable.

There are no prizes for guessing which hardware controls do what, as they're matched by equivalent graphical counterparts on the software interface. One slap of Xponent's crossfader triggers an instant corresponding response in the Torq software. All the controls generate MIDI data too, so they can be remapped as you please. Additionally, the X/Y control pad can either send MIDI data, or control your computer's mouse cursor. So far so

good, but let's see what happens when you start spinning...

**Tune me up, Scotty**

The software can handle MP3, AIFF, WAV, WMA, Apple Lossless and AAC formats. Torq's Browser is nothing we haven't seen before, but the X/Y control pad makes it easy to select your tunes without having to touch the host computer. Furthermore, assembling a playlist is child's play. Ease of use would seem to be where the Torq Xponent system's main strength lies.

As soon as you've loaded a track in, an accurate tempo reading is detected. From here, it's simply a

case of pushing a button to match track tempos. What's more, it's simple to halve or double the detected tempo if the detection system gets it wrong, and you're free to enter in the BPM of tracks that you already know the speed of. You can also 'lock' each deck so that the tempo or pitch can be adjusted independently with the timestretching/pitchshifting functions.

As if that doesn't make it all effortless enough, Torq assigns an adjustable Phase Grid to the track. Manage this correctly and you'll enjoy a whole new level of simple mixing. With the Master Tempo control switched on and both decks in Sync mode, the Phase Grid works in such a way that you'll never have to worry about hitting a late cue ever again.

M-Audio have pulled out all the stops in order to make mixing with Torq Xponent as painless as possible, then. Depending on which features you use, it's even possible to pull off a perfectly tight mix with the sound turned off! The Phase Grid is highly visible on the Torq interface, you see, which means that you can line up the grids by eye while watching the timers. Torq dumps a TRQ file into the track's folder so that it doesn't have to redetect the timing settings each time you load a song. Thankfully, none of these fancy aids are obligatory, just in

## FXponent

A top selling point of the system is its integrated Effects Rack. To be honest, we felt this was a little lacking. The structure of it seems pretty well thought-out, with each deck having access to three internal effects and one external VST plug-in, which can be used in either Send or Insert routing styles.

The internal effect options are Delay, Reverb, Flanger, Phaser, Dual-Filter, Distortion, Strobe (gating), Reverse, Brake and Repeat... none of which sound particularly professional. The parameters, although quite basic, are fine, but it's the sound that counts, and these are very cheap-sounding compared to what else is on the market. They're

This has got to be the most disappointing aspect of the whole thing. By default, the CDJ Mode just doesn't act like the kind of CD decks found in clubs all over the world. When you touch the jog wheel, the track stops dead... and it's very noticeable and abrupt. You can disengage this 'touch sensitivity', but still, the feel doesn't compare to that of most DJing CD decks. We felt that the wheels were too heavy.

In Vinyl Mode, you're free to scratch, spin-back and generally treat



▲ Like the Mixer, the Effects Rack on Torq Xponent is exceptionally easy to control

somewhat flat, lifeless and dull, which is the last thing you want for DJing.

This wouldn't be so bad on a budget system, but at this price, we expect a certain high standard. Even the EQs on the mixer don't sound too hot, which eventually led us to avoid excessive use of the EQs to achieve the best sound – hardly an ideal

situation! When you combine these flaws with the distinct lack of authentic vinyl emulation and the poor feel of the CDJ Mode control, you might be tempted to explore other options. Some will feel that the advantages of this system over even a low-level CD mixing system won't be enough to outweigh its drawbacks.

– way below authentic. Hybrid Mode is somewhere in between, but don't leap with excitement just yet, for as convenient as it might be, there's nothing impressive here.

On a more positive note, all the buttons on the surface are backlit, which will help in the live situation, and there's an expression pedal input too, which is a nice touch. The knobs and faders performed well enough during testing, but they're rather plasticky and we worry that they might not hold up on the road.

## Torq to me, baby

The fact that the system has no audio input whatsoever (despite being an audio interface!) and only two virtual decks is a real drag. However, on its knees, begging for forgiveness, Torq offers a built-in sampler and ReWire compatibility. You can route the audio outputs of Torq into any ReWire host, allowing for some pretty diverse live performance configurations. Even if you're not ready to ReWire, Torq's 16-cell sampler is fine for jingles and a few effects. There's also a loop tool that can sync to track tempo, although we weren't blown away by its simplicity. Certainly, there are plenty of other DJing packages that handle this more elegantly.

Torq Xponent has some good features and ideas, it must be said, and it's very easy to use, making straightforward mixing a doddle. It'd be great for beginners, then, but at this price, it's sitting in semi-pro territory, and such users will expect a consistent standard throughout. When such fundamental elements as the effects, the lack of audio inputs, the quality of scratching and the feel of the jog wheels are letting the side down, you have to wonder whether Xponent is worth the extra outlay when compared to similar products in lower price brackets. **cm**

## “SOME STANDALONE CDJ TURNTABLES ON THE MARKET HAVE BETTER VINYL EMULATION”

case you prefer the traditional 'seat of the pants' mixing techniques.

### Xponential control

Unfortunately, we're not convinced by the general feel of Xponent's controls. There are three basic mix modes in which Torq Xponent operates: CDJ Mode, Vinyl Mode and Hybrid Mode.

the jog wheels as if they were proper decks. Which would be great, except that they don't act like real record decks, and it certainly doesn't sound anything like vinyl. In fact, some standalone CDJ turntables on the market have better vinyl emulation than Torq Xponent provides. The scratching sounds particularly 'digital'



▲ Mix your tracks with the sound off – can DJing get any easier than this?

### ALTERNATIVELY

#### Behringer BCD3000

N/A » N/A » £172

A much more affordable offering, boxed with the LE version of Native Instrument's renowned Traktor Scratch 3

#### Numark Total Control

N/A » N/A » £229

Another more reasonable option, including Numark's very own Cue LE software and NI Traktor LE

## VERDICT

### FOR

- + Quick and easy to setup
- + Supports VST and ReWire
- + Makes mixing dead easy...

### AGAINST

- ...Sometimes a little too easy!
- Doesn't feel that great
- Only two virtual decks
- Expensive
- Effects and scratching are lacklustre

Xponent's ease of use makes it ideal for inexperienced digital DJs with cash to burn, but as a pro solution, it doesn't quite cut it due to coming up short in a few important areas

### RATING

