M-Audio Torq Xponent | £479

Round two for Torq as it's paired with the Xponent audio/MIDI controller. ***Marc '01'*** mixes in the box

WHAT IS IT?

An all-in-one audio, MIDI and software package for the digital DJ

CONTACT

Who: M-Audio
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HIGHLIGHTS

1 The big scratch wheels
2 Cool hypnotic light show
3 Audio, MIDI and software all in one box!

SPECS

Audio Soundcard
Four RCA outputs for independent control of the house system and monitors
Quarter-inch headphone output with cue and volume
16-bit/48kHz sample rate
MIDI In and Out
Footswitch and pedal

Mixer controls:
Two vertical volume controls
Two 3-band EQ controls
Crossfader control with transform buttons
Two LED volume meters
Plays MP3, AIFF, WAV, WMA, Apple Lossless and AAC

System Requirements
Mac and PC compatible ASIO and Core Audio

PC: Windows XP SP2, Pentium IV 1.4 GHz, 512MB RAM, USB

Mac: G4 1.5GHz, Mac OS X 10.4.9, 1GB RAM, USB

Torq Xponent follows on nicely where Torq Connective left off. It combines the same virtual DJ software (Torq) but this time it's got a hands-on MIDI controller/soundcard designed especially for DJs who want to mix 'in the box'.

Set-up is straightforward: some drivers need to be installed as well as Torq, but the rest works straight out of the box. All the controls are pre-mapped ready to go, and the Xponent hardware is the security dongle for Torq.

Hardware and software share a similar design style and layout. This is a big advantage for users as there's no confusion when jumping between hands-on control, and checking the computer screen for extra info such as examining the track's waveforms or loading new effects.

There are serious amounts of flashing lights on this box, which can be made to strobe in sync with the beat at the touch of a button. All the buttons have low-level backlighting for seeing in the dark and high-level to show they're active – perfect for clubs.

Xponent has a number of unique features that set it apart from other MIDI controllers. For a start, it's the biggest one out there. More space makes for a better layout and easy ergonomics. If other MIDI controllers feel cramped or squashed, then Xponent will be right up your street.

The large platters feel good to work with and respond to movements with precision. They have two touch-sensitive zones; the outside ring can be moved back and forth for adjusting the pitch, while the top surface is used for scratching. There's a dedicated button above each platter for switching the scratch mode on and off, so if you prefer you can use the whole platter just for pitch adjusting.

It responds rather well to the scratch, and this comes down to a combination of hardware sensitivity and the ultra-low latency of the sound card. Basic cuts and rewinds are well within its capabilities, but for true vinyl emulation and virtuoso scratching, Conectiv will always be a better option.

Some controllers perform poorly when it comes to pitch adjustment. This is because they transmit MIDI CC messages, which are limited to 128 stages. Xponent has a better solution, it uses MIDI pitchbend messages, which have a much higher resolution and therefore it allows more precise adjustments for beat mixing. If beat matching is not desired then the Torq software can easily beat sync one track to another using the Sync buttons on the unit, which worked out sweet every time. This leaves you free to concentrate on other aspects of the mix, such as adding effects.

These can be controlled directly using the set of dedicated buttons and dials. This is great in itself, but Xponent adds a little something extra by way of the X-Y touchpad that sits at the top of the unit. This has two modes: the first is pure MIDI, which (as hinted) brings a bit of Kaoss-style effects action to the mix. The second mode turns into a laptop style touchpad, which can be used in place of a mouse to access any part of the software and operate the computer – very neat.

Xponent should be top of the list for anyone wanting to go down the digital route. It's perfect for Torq, and can be subjugated to work with other software through MIDI Learn. It may be a bit to big to fit in a back pack, but it's a lot of fun to mix with. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

Don't mind using Torq to mix? Then this is best all-in-one package that we've seen yet for digital DJs.

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