

Novation Remote 25SL Mk II | £330

Version 2 of Novation's SL keyboard controllers are here but do they contain the updates you want?
Jono Buchanan goes a-searching...



WHAT IS IT?

A revision to Novation's compact keyboard 'do it all' DAW controller

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Clearer to use in low light conditions
- 2 Speed Dial
- 3 Automap 3

PRICING

SL25 Mk2
£330
SL49 Mk2
£400
SL61 Mk2
£500

Novation have been big hitters in the DAW controller market for some time and currently have a range of

options available for anyone who wants to put the power of their DAW under their fingertips. Most recently, their price-busting Nocturn interface was wildly and raucously received, partly as it brought Novation's Automap software to a multi-function control surface for a credit crunch busting £90.

At Musik Messe, Novation unveiled the latest offerings in their product range in this area, which arrive in the form of a revision to Novation's existing SL range of keyboards and control surfaces. This review focuses on the

keyboard controllers, with two octave (25SL), four octave (49SL) and five octave (61SL) versions available.

Look, I'm new!

A quick tour of the SL's front panel will tell you that Novation have restyled the SL MkII pretty considerably, particularly if you do your first checks under low light. Suddenly, everything is ablaze with colour. For starters, the rotary encoders are all flanked by LEDs, giving you immediate status updates on any assigned parameter. These rotaries are now smooth-running, unlike the detented ones of the original which I, for one, much prefer. Like the dials, the rows of buttons are all back-lit too,

all of which means that when busy, the SL looks like it could easily replace most people's Christmas decorations for festivity and colour. All joking aside, for DJs or touring musicians who rely on being able to tweak and select parameters at the back of a gloomy stage, it's hard to over-state the importance of this development.

The general additional layer of brightness is even more impressive bearing in mind that, with MkII, the SL range loses one of its blue back-lit displays. It's quite rare that an update gets shot of such a key feature, so you'd be forgiven for being more curious as to why it has gone. One of the main reasons is undoubtedly that the right-hand display was primarily employed to display the status of the physical faders which were positioned just underneath on the SL MkI. Now that these faders have been restyled, with a clearer 'touch' portion, the second display could have seemed extraneous. However, another reason is that the Automap 3 software (see the *Automap 3* box) now features a heads-up GUI, which means that all parameter settings for the whole unit appear onscreen simultaneously.

The look and feel is more robust and classy, despite the obviously 'plastic' nature of the SL's construction and this is mirrored by the Fatar-designed





keyboard action which has a really nice response and provides aftertouch. The pads are touch-sensitive too and offer a reassuring level of control – you’ve really got to give these bad boys a whack to elicit 127 units of velocity, which is exactly how it should be.

Speedy Dial

Speed Dial, which first appeared on Novation’s Compact controller and which features on Nocturn as well,

hovering. So, if you want to control cutoff within Live’s Analog synth, for instance, just hover there. If you suddenly want to crank the amount of downsampling in Redux, hover there instead. Very clever and very useful.

Also new is a series of Automap buttons which allow you to take direct control of the Automap system directly from the front of the unit. Whereas on the previous version you were forced to sacrifice a set of control buttons to get

system. There’s a dedicated ‘Transport’ button too which, when armed, lets you drive your DAW’s transport controls directly. Neatly though, when de-activated, these buttons can be assigned to other parameters.

Conclusion

Whether SL Mk I is the controller update Novation users were asking for will depend on what it was they didn’t like on MkI. There are plenty of users

who still don’t like the pitch-bend/mod wheel joystick and it transpires that the rumoured cross-fade dial has been left off the keyboards and is only available on

the Zero SL MkII. Equally, you might be alarmed to discover that one of the LCD displays has disappeared but, as discussed, this is not a major blow. Also I, for one, would love to see a 76 or 88-key version for pro studios.

However, if you were among the users who wanted better visual feedback from the unit, even more parameter control, a more rugged construction and enhancements to Automap, the beating software heart of this range, you can’t fail to be impressed. Equally, if you’re new to the whole concept but are in the market for a controller keyboard which can grab your DAW by the Jacobs, the SL MkII could be just the ticket. **FM**

This single dial allows you to take control of any onscreen parameter over which your mouse is hovering

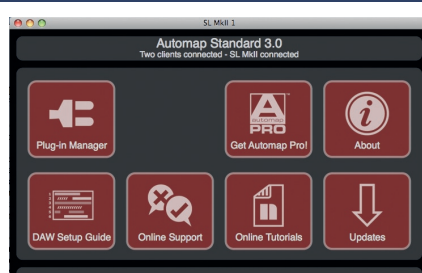
comes to the SL range now too. In case you missed this handy feature, this single dial in the middle of the unit, directly above the keyboard allows you to take control of any onscreen parameter over which your mouse is

to grips with Automap, the inclusion of buttons such as ‘Learn’ for instant assignment, ‘View’ for bringing up the Automap GUI and ‘User’, for browsing your saved assignment pages brings a whole new level of instant tactility to the

Running the Show: Automap 3

A key part of Novation’s controller line has been the inclusion of Automap, their own intelligent system which does exactly what it says on the tin, by automatically mapping relevant controllers from a currently selected plug-in to the dials, buttons and faders of the unit directly.

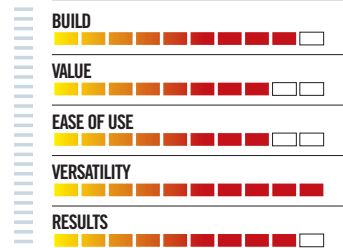
As different DAWs support controllers in different ways there’s plenty of manuals and addendums to wade through and – even in Automap 3 – things still aren’t as immediate as they should be. A full proper manual rewrite is long overdue and one only has to read through lively Internet forum debates to



find people who end up totally stumped by the process. Automap 3, does see some important improvements however, as well as the whole concept divided into two versions for ‘Standard’ and ‘Pro’ users. Automap standard sees the important development of allowing HUI control of DAWs such as Logic and Pro Tools,

while the pay-for upgrade to Pro allows for multiple SL (or Nocturn) devices to ‘cascade’, thereby supporting many more parameters, as well as providing the ability for the unit to ‘Learn’ computer key commands. These additional benefits can be yours for £20. It’s a great system so why is it such a pain to get going?

FutureMusic VERDICT



Looks better, feels better and with Automap 3 and Speed Dial, could be a class leader.

SPECS

Assignable controls:

- > 8 Encoders (Infinite Rotation) with touch-sensitivity and 11 segment LED rings
- > 8 Pots (270 Rotation) with touch-sensitivity
- > 8 Sliders with touch-sensitivity
- > 32 Buttons with integrated LEDs (37 in MIDI mode)
- > 8 soft feel Trigger pads
- > Xpression Pad
- > Xpression Stick
- > Touch sensitive Speed Dial

System buttons:

- > General Automap Operation Buttons (Learn, View, Browser Groups etc.)
- > Octave up/down buttons with LED indicator

Rear Panel connections:

- > USB port
- > MIDI: In, Out x 2, Thru
- > Sustain Pedal: 1 x 1/4 Jack Input
- > Expression pedal: 1 x 1/4 Jack Input
- > Power switch: Ext DC/USB

System Requirements:

PC: Pentium 3/1GHz/256MB RAM Windows XP with Service Pack 2 or greater (Vista 32/64 also supported)

Mac: Mac OS X 10.4.0 or greater (Leopard also supported) 64/1GHz, 256MB RAM

Dimensions:

25SL
468 x 68 x 293mm
49SL
803 x 68 x 293mm
61SL
965 x 68 x 293mm

Weights:

25SL
3.3kg
49SL
5.2kg
61SL
6.1kg