Akai MPK 88 | £600

Akai's MPK range has proven very popular with those looking for fully spec'd controllers. ***Dan 'JD73' Goldman*** checks out the latest family member

WHAT IS IT?

Akai's latest MPK MIDI controller keyboard now with weighted piano action

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Very playable and nicely weighted keyboard with aftertouch
2 Lots of control DAW templates available
3 Easy to use on the whole

SPECS

General: 16 x 4 banks of drum pads, 3x banks of 8 rotaries, sliders and switches, MIDI-syncable arpeggiator, pitch and mod wheels, backlit screen, fully weighted hammer action with aftertouch
Computer Interface: USB/MIDI
MIDI Ins/Outs: 1
Dimensions: 1313 x 378 x 132mm
Weight: 30kg

The MPK88 is a beast! When it first arrived I was shocked by its size and bulk. It weighs in at a pretty weighty 67lbs (30kg) so make sure there are two of you around to unbox it and set it up.

It's a good-looking machine, in keeping with the MPC, MPD and MiniAK products. Everything feels well made on the whole, with the main case made of tough black plastic on a metal chassis. The rotary dials feel smooth and have little play in them and the buttons all have a reassuring click.

However, the sliders feel a bit flimsy with lots of sideward play and I'm not sure how well these would stand up, particularly on the road. Disappointing at this price point.

Hammer time

Fortunately the weighted hammer keybed is impressive. In fact, it's one of the best I've played. It's not too light or heavy, has none of the sponginess and slow key return that plagues some hammer actions and it's well suited to all types of playing, including clav or organ styles. Connections include USB for powering the MPK from your computer, a wall wart power adaptor socket (though it's tight of Akai to not include one!) MIDI in and out (and why not two sets of MIDI ports after all this is a MIDI controller!) Two footswitch jacks and an expression pedal jack.

A quick scoot around the panel shows a large number of controls. First up there are the obligatory pitch wheels backlit in yellow. To the right are controls for splitting the keyboard, for selecting the 16x4 MPC pad banks and below are controls for switching the MIDI-syncable arpeggiator on and off, a latch switch and the note repeat function lifted from the MPC range for playing rolls and inputting notes (you hold the note repeat button and hold a pad and hey presto instant 16ths or 8ths etc).

The pads feel OK, but they could definitely be a little thicker like those on my MPC1000 as they do bottom out quite easily.

Automatic DAW

In the middle of the board is a clear and informative blue backlit screen. Presets (which contains all the front panel assignments) are displayed at the top with MIDI channel and controller assignments/other info displayed underneath. Below are the transport controls for your DAW's sequencer. It's very easy to navigate the menus on the whole, plus there's an included PC/Mac editor (and a Lite version of Ableton too) that makes things even easier if required.

Logical

All in all, this is a well-built, user-friendly and pretty versatile controller board with a great keybed. There are a good number of controls available and all are generally easy to map, plus the MPK comes with several presets to get you started with most types of DAW software. But why no preset mapping template for Logic Pro? Right now it all has to be set up manually. I'll be watching that website for updates.

In fact I spent a good while head scratching, trying to map and sync the transport controls to Logic's (though mapping the rotaries was easier). And why can this massive keyboard only be zoned into two areas? If these negatives don't affect your mode of working, I'd highly recommend it. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A few issues here and there considering the price but a fine board with a great keybed.

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