

CME Bitstream 3X | £408

Power is nothing without control. *Greg Scarth* takes on one of the most versatile controllers on the market

WHAT IS IT?

Ultra-versatile MIDI controller with built-in automation features

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Four rotary pots and faders, crossfader, joystick and ribbon controller
- 2 Integrated LFO, motion sequencer and arpeggiator
- 3 Dedicated Mackie, Logic and Reason control modes

SPECS

32 rotary pots. 8 fader. Crossfader. X-Y joystick. Ribbon controller. 21 groups. 100 scene memories. Built-in LFO, motion sequencer and arpeggiator. MIDI In, Thru and two outputs. Footswitch input. DIN SYNC24 output. USB bus power or DC adapter. LCD screen. Dedicated configuration software for Mac and PC

Dimensions: 420 x 180 x 25mm

Weight: 4.7kg

The Bitstream 3X, jointly produced by Wave Idea and CME, offers an enticing blend of MIDI features and

customisable setup options which should add up to make a very versatile device. The new limited edition Ivory model on test here is internally identical to the standard black version but sports a look seemingly inspired by the grey and orange colour scheme of the Roland TR-909.

Stiff and sturdy

On removing the Bitstream from its box, it's immediately apparent that the all-steel enclosure is built to last. The downside of this sturdy construction is that the 3X weighs in at the best part of 5kg, so if you're planning to lug it around for live performances you may want to hit the gym first.

On its surface, the controller features eight columns of rotary pots and crossfaders, a vertical ribbon controller, an X-Y axis joystick controller and a small crossfader. In use, all of the controls are nice and sturdy with the exception of the miniature crossfader, which feels flimsy and a bit loose.

The joystick is light and sensitive, like a PlayStation thumb controller without the self-centring action, while



Bitstream 3X comes with a comprehensive software editor to map and save presets

the ribbon is nicely recessed into the front panel but perhaps slightly on the narrow side for larger fingers.

Twist and slide

Unfortunately, in use, the knobs and sliders aren't the best I've had the pleasure of tweaking. The rotary pots are nice enough, if slightly on the stiff side, but the faders on my review model felt strangely uneven, offering very little resistance along part of their range then suddenly stiffening up.

It may just be a case of the components taking time to break in, but I'd expect better at this price level. When it comes to taking control of your synths and software, the Bitstream is absolutely packed with features, from 100 scene memory slots to seven

alternative curve models for each control and dedicated Mackie, Logic and Reason controller modes.

Even more powerfully, the B3X can generate its own automation data, either in the form of an LFO signal (which can be sync'd to an internal or external MIDI clock), Electribe-style motion sequencing or an arpeggiator output which takes a note input and generates a rhythmic or melodic variation based on a series of predefined rules.

Complex

The in-depth feature set all adds up to make the B3X quite complex in operation. I'm not ashamed to say it had me scratching my head on a couple of occasions while I set everything up. Unfortunately the English manual is quite poorly written, but Wave Idea's support team were efficient in helping me overcome a few minor glitches and issues. I'd strongly recommend using the excellent Mac or PC configuration software to customise settings rather than trying to access all the parameters through the small LCD screen.

Once set up, there are very few complaints about the controller's operation. The Bitstream 3X isn't perfect but its wide range of features make it worth considering as a very flexible all-round control solution. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD	■■■■■
VALUE	■■■■■
EASE OF USE	■■■■■
VERSATILITY	■■■■■
RESULTS	■■■■■
Sturdily constructed MIDI controller with versatile options but tricky setup process.	

