

Novation Launch Control & Launchkey Mini | £79 each

Novation upsize their controller range by downsizing the products, and adding iOS support. **Martin Delaney** brings his iPad and a magnifying glass

WHAT IS IT?

Diminutively-proportioned MIDI hardware that promises full size feature sets

CONTACT

Who: Novation
Tel: +44 (0)1494 462246
Web: www.novationmusic.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 As portable as you'd hope – you can take these anywhere!
- 2 Typical Novation build and support – they don't feel like toys
- 3 iOS and Linux compatibility for maximum versatility

Novation have been busy, expanding their controller range (Launchkeys), updating previous models (Launchpad S), releasing new hardware synths (MiniNova), and reissuing old favourites (Bass Station II). Now they're targeting laptop/iOS users with a new range of scaled-down hardware: the Launchpad Mini (see our review last month), the Launchkey Mini, and the all-new Launch Control.

If this was just about the smaller designs, that would be interesting enough, up to a point, but it's also about compatibility. These devices are buss-powered from computer or iPad, and also compatible with Windows, OS X, and Linux. A suite of controllers that are truly portable between your studio and mobile devices is pretty tantalising.

Bright orange underbelly

The Launchkey Mini is Novation's entry in the mini-keyboard stakes, which lines

it up against Korg's Microkey and Akai's MPK Mini. Effectively it's the baby of Novation's Launchkey range, with 25 keys, 16 velocity-sensitive pads (with three-colour RGB backlights), eight assignable knobs, and seven function buttons. This is a healthy amount of input for such a small device. Most importantly, the Launchkey's base is

bright orange, a 'feature' it shares with the other Minis. And why not? Tiny keyboards like this are only one step up from using the virtual equivalents you get in Live and Logic, but they are playable, and you do get velocity sensitivity. The package also includes a USB cable, free downloads of Ableton Live Lite, V-Station and Bass Station soft synths, and a Loopmasters sample pack; this is the same across the range.

You can never have too many knobs in your studio, and the Launch Control is a cheap and compact way to add 16 more, along with eight pads. The pads aren't velocity sensitive, but they're still backlit with those three-colour RGB LEDs. Eight factory and eight user banks provide many times more control per square inch of surface area.

Lightweights in a good way

In terms of build quality the Minis don't feel particularly delicate, and they're not as teeny as you might think. The keys on the Launchkey are small, true, but given that it also hosts pads, buttons, and knobs, that's a fair compromise. It's about overall control of the software, rather than getting a piano-style experience.

Back to the Future

Novation have history with mobile music production, going way back before any of this iOS business. Their X-Station 25, from 2004, is a classic portable synth which could run from mains power, USB, or batteries, as well as functioning as a decent audio interface and MIDI controller.

And back in 1992, they released MM10, a 25-key keyboard controller, which existed solely to complement Yamaha's battery powered, VHS tape sized, QY10 hardware sequencer. It had a little slot on top, for the QY10, much like some iPad-hosting keyboards now, and a

cable which sent power and MIDI to the QY. I believe the MM10 would run off batteries or mains power. This was a point of entry into electronic music production for some folks, and I should know, as I was one of them. I still have the MM10 and QY10, packed away but treasured!





Novation have made set-up as straightforward as possible, whether you're using the Minis with their free Launchkey and Launchpad iOS apps, or with Ableton Live, Logic Pro, and FL Studio, or any other DAW, on the computer. There are no drivers to install, and there are starter templates for Live,

regular controller in a small package (minus pitch, mod, or aftertouch), and with specific functionality for Logic Pro, Cubase, ProTools, Reason, and FL Studio. The Control is a perfect companion for Logic Pro X's Smart Controls – 12 on-screen knobs that take over the currently selected device. Logic

with two controllers and both apps running in sync – that's a good thing! The Launchpad app has an in-app purchase to enable import of user samples, making it a more serious proposition, although strangely, unlike the Launchkey app, it doesn't support Audiobus. Of course, the Launchkey

and Control also function with other MIDI apps, but using them with the Novation apps is a no-brainer.

For laptop or iOS musicians,

these Novations add that all-important tactile control vibe. The Launchkey Mini is particularly cool with Novation's iOS app, and I kept gravitating back to the Control, because of the Ableton Live templates, and its perfect layout for Logic's Smart Controls. Nobody will fetishise over these things, but everybody could use at least one of them. Very handy little objects. **FM**

An iPad based set-up with two controllers and both apps running in sync – that's a good thing!

FL Studio, and Reason to download. Up to a point, instant control is available, and beyond that you can create your own custom MIDI assignments and save them in the user presets on the Launchkey or Launch Control.

Great little controller

I began with Live on OS X. After configuration in Live's Preferences, both devices had some immediate control over Live. The Launchkey handled basics, such as track mute/solo, scenes, and macros, but the Control went further, with three separate templates, covering more detailed mixer functions, sends, clip launching, and device control. With user presets as well, the Control made a great little controller for Live. There's also a dedicated on-screen editor, which adds further flexibility.

There are clearly functional differences between the devices; they're not just the same device with/without a keyboard. The Launchkey behaves like a

remembers MIDI assignments across projects, so you only need to set this up once. One thing that could be confusing is the pads. The Launchkey pads are velocity sensitive, the Control's aren't. It's not a huge problem either way, but something to ponder when choosing. Also the Launchkey and the Launchpad Mini use mini-USB to connect, while the Launch Control uses full-size USB.

iOS live rig

To connect to an iPad, you need Apple's Camera Connection Kit. The iPad will happily power a single Mini; you can use a mains powered USB hub to connect two at once. Logically, I started with Novation's Launchkey app and the matching keyboard. The app hosts synth sounds and effects, with a touch interface, and the Launchkey does the rest, making a very usable self-contained instrument. This app runs alongside, and in sync with, the Launchpad app; an iPad based set-up

SPECS

Launchkey Mini:
25-note keyboard
16 velocity sensitive
three-colour pads
8 knobs, 7 function buttons,
2 performance buttons
Class compliant USB: works
with USB on Mac OSX,
Windows, Linux, and iPad
(Apple Camera Connection
Kit required for iPad)
Buss powered by connection
to computer or iPad
Kensington lock slot

Dimensions:

325 x 175 x 43mm

Weight:

675g

Launch Control:

16 knobs
8 three-colour pads
8 user templates and
8 factory templates
Class compliant USB: works
with USB on Mac OSX,
Windows, Linux, and iPad
(Apple Camera Connection
Kit required for iPad)
Editor software for
on-screen editing
Buss powered by connection
to computer or iPad
Kensington Lock Slot

Dimensions:

240 x 118 x 23mm

Weight:

470g

ALTERNATIVES



Akai MPK25

£69

25 small keys, 8 pads, and 8 knobs, this is Akai's take on the mini keyboard-plus-controls. If this is still too big, try the LPK25!

www.akaipro.com



Korg nanoKey

£49

If you're an obsessive minimalist and the Launchkey Mini is too big, try the tiny Korg nanoKey!

www.korg.com



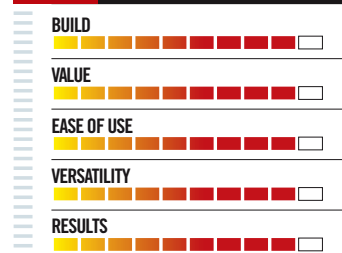
Apple iPad Mini

£269

For a more high-tech flexible solution, still keeping it compact, the iPad Mini supports powerful control apps such as Lemur, TouchAble, and MIDI Touch.

www.apple.com

FutureMusic VERDICT



Novation's Mini range makes it possible to have 'real' controllers you can use everywhere you go.