

Nord Lead 4

£1,549

The latest Nord Lead is here and while it looks very familiar, much has changed under the hood. **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** turns red...

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

Upgraded version of the Electro with real drawbars

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Authentic analogue emulation, with plenty of sound shaping options
- 2 Dial-per-function ethos with Impulse Morphing
- 3 Wavetables, tasty effects and new filter modes

PRICING

Nord Lead 4
£1,549
Nord Lead 4R
£1,349

Having a new Nord synth to test is always exciting and the latest NL4, though predictably red, is no

exception. You'd be forgiven for thinking it was an older Lead 2X but on closer inspection, quite a bit has changed. Firstly, there's the addition of wooden end cheeks. These look beautiful and protect the synth nicely and, although they add a little extra weight, the NL4 can still easily be picked up in one hand, which is a godsend for gigging.

Nords are always ruggedly built too, and in this respect it's business as usual with the NL4. It has the familiar tough metal case, along with the classic Nord wooden pitch bend (now with independent up/down ranges and four octave range – can we have this on the Stage 2 please?), plus the quirky stone effect mod wheel. The rubberised dials are sturdy and the hard plastic switches

are built to last, though I would prefer them to bottom out more softly.

The front panel is typically Nord and it's great that most functions have their own dedicated dial, plus there's no menu diving involved in the main. However, there are a lot of secondary functions accessed via the shift button which I'm still not a massive fan of – a second shift button to the right of the panel would also help ergonomically.

Whilst it's great that there are so many direct controls, the downside is they are crammed into a smallish area, which seems a little crazy considering how much spare real estate is available on the right of the front panel. Obviously, this is a cost saving measure so that the same control panel can be used on the rack version and, whilst it's nice to be able to rest another module, iPad or laptop on the panel, I think most folks would prefer a more spacious

control panel that was also easier to read and navigate, with more dedicated dials rather than hidden secondary functions. It would have also been great to see the NL3 LED encoders return, though of course that would bring with it more extra cost. Maybe next time!

On the small screen

Unfortunately, Clavia are still using a small red LED display on the NL4 instead of the lovely bright display that features on the Wave/Stage 2. As it's only numeric, you have to remember patches by bank/number only which is pretty antiquated in 2013, though sounds can at least be named/ordered in the Sound Manager over USB. Also, a lot of system functions rely on you looking up the function on the front panel list and then dealing with cryptic letters on the display, which again isn't ideal and a bigger screen would have eliminated this completely. Thankfully, when you turn a dial, the level pops up temporarily in the display so you always know where your sounds are at. Also, pressing 'copy' and turning any dial shows you its value, which is extremely useful.

Moving on, I really dig the keybed in the NL4 – it has a very shallow key travel, which is superb for fast accurate playing, and the 49-note span is enough for most synth playing duties and accommodates keyboard splits nicely. Splitting/layering is simple too and pressing the split button plus any note sets the desired split point. This is a big improvement over the Lead 2X and Wave, which have no split functionality. The biggest omission here is aftertouch (why leave it out of a performance synth?) though the new Impulse Morph buttons go some way to



Impulse Morph

These controls are momentary switches for affecting multiple mod destinations at once. Very quick to set up and use and you can seriously flip your sounds from soft to manic in an instant.

Pitch & Mod

The pitch wheel can have separate up and down values over a four-octave range whilst the modwheel can be used as a Morph source for controlling several parameters at once, or as a vibrato control.

Filters & FX

There are some great new filter modes including authentic TB303 and MiniMoog ladder emulations. The effects sound great and they include bit crushing, compression, talk FX, drive and comb-filtering plus an analogue-style delay and reverb with brightness.

**MIDI**

The NL4 is four-part multi-timbral. There's DIN MIDI In/Out plus a USB MIDI interface.

Connections

There are four outputs (one per slot). There's also a headphone output plus there are control pedal and sustain pedal inputs.

offsetting its omission. Still, it should have been included, especially at this price point.

In most other respects, the NL4 is equal to, or a big improvement over the much-loved Lead 2X. Polyphony is the same at 20 notes (though more would have been nice for unison/layering) and the NL4 is similarly four-part multi-timbral, giving you four separate synths on separate MIDI Channels, each with their own individual output. This is fantastic for sending out layers within a sound for external processing.

The patch architecture is also largely the same as the 2X, so four banks of 99 programs plus 99 Performances (Performances include up to four layered programs with splits and MIDI info). This is a versatile arrangement and in combination with the Sound Manager it's easy to upload/save/

Filters and Effects

The new filter types each have a distinctive character with modelled drive. My favourite is the 'Ladder M' filter that authentically emulates MiniMoog filter/drive. It's perfect for growling basses and harmonically rich leads. The TB emulation is also great, with a thinner more cutting tone

similar to a TB303. Also, the LP48 mode is deep and rich and is great for round basses and smoother sounds.

Effects-wise the new 'Talk' effects are pretty cool for vocal like sounds, the (bit) Crush is superb for nasty aliasing sounds (particularly when modulated by the mod

wheel), the compression packs a decent punch for basses and drums, and the comb filter can sound phaser-like when modulated! The drive effect (in addition to the filter drive) is pretty good too. Finally, the reverbs and delays are seriously nice and the reverb has a brightness function.

Clocking on

One of the biggest bonuses on the NL4 compared to the 2X is Master Clock Synchronisation which allows the arpeggiator, two LFOs and delays to be sync'd to time divisions/MIDI clock

The oscillator section has been completely overhauled, with a much-improved VA engine. Whilst there are the same basic waves available as on the 2X, these have been refined, with better resolution/clarity and less

aliasing. This means the NL4 has a clearer, punchier and more upfront character, with less harshness in the midrange. The only slight

criticism here is that the NL4 is quite refined in the low end and without EQ (the Wave and Stage 2 have onboard EQ) you may find it lacks a little bass extension. Regardless, it can do super-authentic analogue impressions and then more warped sounds in the blink of an eye, (particularly with the new filter modes) and the envelopes are also super-snappy, which means it can do very authentic Moog-like basses and punchy drum sounds. The new unison modes sound lovely too, thickening up and widening sounds nicely. I also love Nord's mono glide algorithm in the NL4, though it's a shame there's no polyphonic mode.

Superb sounds

In the Osc Mod section there's a handy new Soft Sync mode for locked-yet-soulful sounds. This is in addition to the Hard Sync and two new FM modes that offer higher modulation intensities for more harmonically rich FM sounds. These new modes sound superb, even giving my Yamaha SY77 a run for its

SPECS**Keyboard**

4-octave (49-keys) with velocity sensitive
20 voices
Wooden Pitch Stick (+/- 48 semitones)
Modulation Wheel
2 Morph Sources (Modulation Wheel / Control Pedal, Note Velocity)
3 Impulse Morph buttons, up to 7 combinations per program

Synth Section

4-part multi-timbral

OSC1: Triangle, Saw, Square, Pulse, 114 wavetables

OSC2: Triangle, Square, Saw, Noise, Sine, Transpose and Fine Tune

Oscillator 1 Modulation: Frequency Modulation, Soft and Hard sync with amount Control

Mono or Legato with Glide-function

Filter: 7 filter types with keyboard Tracking, Drive and ADSR/bipolar Envelope control

Amplifier Envelope: ADSR controls

Modulation Envelope: selectable AD or AR, attack decay/release and bipolar (+/-) amount controls

LFO 1 Waveforms: Square, inverted Saws, Saws & Triangle, bipolar (+/-) Amount control

LFO 1 Destinations: Filter, Osc Mod, Osc Mix, Osc 2 Pitch, Amplitude, Pulse width

LFO 2 Waveforms: Square, Inverted Saw, Saw, Random, Sample & Hold, Triangle, Bipolar (+/-) Amount control

LFO 2 Destinations: Filter, Osc Mod, Osc 1 & Osc 2 Pitch, Pan, FX

Program Section

400 programs
99 Performances
Four slots A, B, C & D
Octave Shift

Effect Section

Crush, Compressor, Drive, Talk 1, Talk 2, Comb Filter. Delay, synchronisable to master clock function – max delay time, 1400ms
Reverb with 3 types with brightness

Connections

4 Line Level Outputs
Stereo Headphone Output
Sustain Pedal input
Control Pedal input
USB-MIDI
MIDI In/Out

Dimensions

870 x 274 x 98mm

Weight

6 kg

It can do super-authentic analogue impressions and then more warped sounds in the blink of an eye

download individual sounds or soundbanks. There's also USB MIDI included as well as DIN MIDI In/Out (no Thru) and most of the dials and buttons receive/transmit MIDI CC's, making the NL4 a great MIDI controller for live or studio duties.

across the four available program slots. This is great for keeping everything locked for super-tight performances and also enables the NL4 to seamlessly integrate with any MIDI-controlled studio or live set-ups, which is invaluable in this day and age.

Keyboard

The NL4 has a velocity sensitive 49-note synth action keyboard (no aftertouch) that can be split and layered. It's fast to play and feels great.



