Pioneer XDJ-AERO DJ System | £809

A pioneering approach or a short-lived gimmick?
Declan McGlynn unplugs with the XDJ AERO

It's been a big year for progress at Pioneer. Their RMX-1000 effects unit came paired with a VST, a first for the company. Then, their CDJ-2000nexus turned heads and raised eyebrows with its Sync button functionality, also a first for their industry-standard players. Now, with their new controller-cum-media player, they're introducing WiFi streaming to bedrooms and booths with the XDJ AERO. It's not all about one feature though, there's also support for USB sticks/harddrives (a single input can be loaded into either deck), a USB port for controlling software like Traktor and two phono inputs for use as a standalone mixer. On top, two jog wheels, sample player, four effects per deck, three-band EQ and filter per channel as well as sync and quantise functions – though oddly, there's no multiple cue point options. At first glance the AERO seems too good to be true – not only do you get a full self-contained digital DJ solution, you also get a two-channel mixer and a MIDI controller. Even if you never looked into the WiFi aspect of the device, it already seems like good value. Pioneer are aiming it at the 'home DJ'

market, a move which makes a lot of sense, but with balanced TRS outputs, we reckon the AERO could hold its own as a mobile DJ solution too. So what of the WiFi? Is it the icing on the cake, or a sour aftertaste?

Wi-fidelity

Pioneer's Rekordbox music analysis software is the beating heart of the WiFi concept on the AERO. It's not possible to load any track onto the AERO that hasn't first been given its blessing by the software, which now works on mobile devices as well as OS X and Windows. Once you've imported your track collection into the software, it's time to connect to the AERO. The device can either operate as an ad-hoc WiFi network or connect to another router, though for lag and stability

Traktor Factor

If you're a Traktor user who's yet to commit to one of NI's own controllers or are a DJ who's tempted by the benefits of laptop DJing but still love turning up to a gig with a USB stick, the AERO is definitely worth considering. It doesn't work as seamlessly as NI's S2 and S4: you'll have to install the audio driver, download the TSI file from Pioneer's website, load it up and assign it as MIDI I/O and audio out manually, change to MIDI Mode and the Mixer Mode to 'PC' on the controller. Then, it springs into life as the AERO and Traktor begin to talk to each other. All the mappings are as expected, bar some odd choices for effects control that you might want to remap. The list of MIDI messages can be found in the manual if you're the kind to customise and it's possible to assign one deck to MIDI while the other uses USB, for example. It's hard to compare the AERO to other two-channel controllers considering the substantial difference in price – this is more of a welcome addition than a key selling point, and adds another string to the AERO's already thick bow.

reasons we'd suggest allowing it to take charge. Diving into its settings, you'll find the WiFi password and once connected, the AERO shows up in Rekordbox either on your mobile device or computer. Now you can control the browser on your device from the AERO, and once you've chosen your track you can either drag it to Deck A or B from Rekordbox or select it from the controller. It's very responsive and remarkably fast at loading – about seven or eight seconds per track. It's worth noting that AIFFs and WAVs cannot be

remains static with the device name until you've selected a track. This means you can't connect to your phone and leave it in your pocket, for example, or connect to your laptop and leave it in another room, or connect to your friend's phones as they arrive at your party. You need to look at the screen of the device to see what track you're about to load and this is counter-intuitive to the wireless concept. Why not just plug it in with a USB cable if you're going to have it constantly next to the device anyway? If the AERO can

you ignored the WiFi side of things, you could get excited about the USB input, two-channel mixer and controller options at this price point. Add the WiFi functionality – which is still finding its feet in terms of usability – and it seems like a no brainer. It's easy to set up and use, is accurately priced and if you need it to be, is a very portable fully self-contained DJ solution. If you think it's a steep price for any entry-level DJs, consider the alternatives. Two CDJ-350s and a DJM-350 weigh in at £1,479, with the optical drive being the only real

> ## "It's easy to set up, is accurately priced and, if you need it to be, is a portable self-contained DJ solution"

loaded over WiFi, only MP3 and AAC files are supported.

So far so good, but the one real stickler here is that, you can't pull through track information from Rekordbox when browsing. Turning the Browse rotary on the AERO only moves the selector on the screen of the device you're loading from; AERO's screen

pull whole tracks out of thin air, surely it can pull through playlist information from Rekordbox too? Hopefully this will be possible with a firmware update. There are a lot of positives about how it works though: it's fast, it was reliable in our testing and in theory it means that you have access to a track library as big as your collective hard drives: up to four WiFi devices can be connected at once.

And the rest

Though the WiFi might be the main event with the AERO it's the USB port for sticks and hard drives that's the real bonus and opens up the AERO beyond a potential gimmick. Plus, unlike the WiFi option, it will read non-Rekordbox'd files and do its best to analyse them on the fly. Build quality is really solid – the jogs feel as good as CDJ-350s and the plastic casing feels like it'll take a beating. The isolator EQs sound good and the classic one-knob filter is a bit thin but sounds as good as you'd expect at this price. Add to that the ability to use the AERO as a controller – see the box – and you're really looking at a home DJ Swiss Army knife.

AERO vis-à-vis

Pioneer have done something very interesting with the XDJ AERO. Even if

difference, and of course, no WiFi.

If you look outside the world of Pioneer, Stanton's SCS.4DJ offers hard drive and USB-stick support but with smaller jogs, no sample playback and no inputs. What makes loads of sense about the AERO isn't just the multi-functionality but also the introduction it will give you to the world of Rekordbox and Pioneer equipment. Not only will anyone who uses the AERO at home become familiar with the layout and functionality of the industry-standard gear that makes up most DJ booths, but they'll also get into the habit of Rekordboxing. It's hard to recommend anything else to someone who's serious about getting into DJing or for a current DJ who's already committed to Rekordbox on CDJs and wants a unit at home to practice, record mixes and try ideas. And add WiFi to the list of features and the deal, as they say, is sealed. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

A versatile, well-built and forward-thinking DJ device. Pioneer live up to their name.