

# Akai MPC Touch | £499

The latest MPC pairs Akai's MPC computer software with an innovative new touchscreen controller.

*Dan 'JD73' Goldman touches base...*

## WHAT IS IT?

Akai's newest Music Production Centre, pairing MPC software (version 1.9) with a high-quality multi-touch controller

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 The touchscreen removes the disconnect between the controller and software
- 2 The Touch controller is very well built, the ergonomics work well and you can sample directly through the hardware
- 3 The MPC software is evolving nicely and offers a lot in the way of beat production facilities

**F**our years have passed since I reviewed the still-flagship MPC Renaissance and the first version of the MPC computer

software. Since then we have seen the new line of controller plus software MPCs evolve into a whole range of MPC-badged products including the entry-level MPC Element/Essentials and the midrange MPC Studio. While the original self-contained and standalone MPCs were labelled MIDI Production Centres, with the launch of the Renaissance, Akai changed the name to Music Production Controller. Fast-forward to 2016 and MPC now stands for Music Production Centre – this is an important change. Whereas the Renaissance, Studio and Element felt like controllers due to their small

screens, Akai have seemingly been working hard to minimise the user's reliance on the computer screen. Much like the Advance controllers and VIP software I recently reviewed, the MPC Touch has a specific remit: it has been designed so it feels like a standalone unit, even though it relies on a Mac/PC to host its brain – the MPC software.

The Touch controller certainly has an understated industrial/functional elegance about it. While the top and sides are made from textured black plastic, the chassis/back is red metal and it all feels reassuringly solid and stable (and weighty) with grippy non-slip feet. For travelling, the footprint is fairly large (and there's no battery power) but it should fit in a larger backpack – currently there's no

dedicated case. MPC Touch connects to your computer via USB (though it requires you to plug in the external wall wart as the screen draws too much current for buss power) and it's designed to reside on your desktop. It can be used flat or you can attach the included two-position stand which tilts the unit upwards – either towards, or away from you.

## Getting hands-on

For anyone who's used to an original (or the newer MPCs), the layout/controls will all feel familiar and you'll be flying about the interface quickly. On the left of the front panel you'll find the famous 16 rubber pads (velocity and pressure sensitive) and they're super-sensitive, registering even the slightest touch. I think their placement on the left works very well in conjunction with the screen and other controls – my only wish is that they were a little softer.

Like the other new MPCs, the pads light up in different colours to denote velocity and different modes/functions and colours can now be fully user-configured too. Above the pads you'll find pad bank buttons which select from the eight available pad banks (A to H). All 22 function buttons on the Touch are made from black rubber (like the pads) and they feel good quality. The buttons are also backlit which is great for quickly finding things in dark environments. Underneath the bank buttons is the Note Repeat button for inputting quantised notes quickly (with



### Casing

The top panel of the MPC Touch is made of high-quality, textured black plastic, while the base and rear is formed from metal and painted red.

### Main/Menu Buttons

These buttons take you to the main beat-making screen and main editing sections of the MPC software. It's all very logical to navigate and feels very natural/intuitive in use.

**Audio Interface**

It has a new 2-in/2-out 24-bit/44.1kHz USB Audio/MIDI interface. Connect instruments to the inputs for sampling, recording or looping. Use the outputs for monitoring or external processing.

**MIDI**

The Touch/MPC software can connect to external MIDI gear and be used as a controller, or external MIDI gear can control the Touch/MPC software via its MIDI interface.

latch for hands-free note-repeating), a Half-Level button for half-level pad velocity, the standard 16 Levels button for accessing graduated functions across the 16 pads (velocity, filter level, etc) and an Erase button you hold down with any pad for erasing notes on the fly.

Moving to the right, under the screen are the Main and Menu buttons for accessing the homepage of the MPC software and accessing the main modes, plus record, overdub, stop, play and play-start buttons (self explanatory!), though unfortunately the bar/locate buttons are gone. Further on, there's a Shift button for accessing secondary functions including note repeat latch, a new copy button for copying sounds/pads across banks, the browser for navigating/loading samples/projects, track select, redo and delete. There's also + and - buttons for moving up and down levels in the software, though I wish the plus button moved up and the minus moved down in the

**MPC Software Version 1.9**

Akai's MPC software is now at version 1.9 and offers a lot of power and versatility – it's been greatly updated with new features and stability enhancements since I reviewed the first incarnation in 2012. For a full overview of all current features, see the user guide (all 300 pages!) on [www.akaipro.com](http://www.akaipro.com).

**Key improvements**

include renaming from the hardware, independent track lengths, a looper, quick swapping/copying of pads/samples within a program, the XYFX feature which allows real-time filtering, beat stuttering/fills and mod FX by dragging across the Touch's screen, improved automation, a much more flexible (and resizable) mixer and a more efficient

audio engine with fewer glitches. The software certainly feels much more like a full production environment now.

It runs standalone or as a plug-in within your DAW, while simultaneously hosting your own plug-ins (and Akai's FX), which can be loaded/inserted directly from the screen with all parameters auto-mapped to the Q-Links.

browser rather than the current reversed implementation!

To the right of the screen are four touch-sensitive Q-link dials that map directly to specific functions depending on the selected mode and there's also a Q-link button that selects the column of

Q links that's in focus for editing – four lights underneath show the column currently selected. Finally, there's the essential jogwheel for rapid-value-changing/cursoring (it also clicks for selecting) and this feels great under the fingers but doesn't feel as solid as the Q-links.

Around the back, as well as the wall wart power socket and USB for MIDI/Audio/computer connection, there's a built-in audio

interface (2-in/2-out, 44.1kHz, 24-bit) with full-sized jack inputs and a record level control for sampling directly into the MPC software, plus a pair of outputs if you want to process your beats using external processors. There's also a minijack for headphones, a master volume control (which really should have made it to the front panel) and a pair of mini jacks for the MIDI breakout cables for connecting external MIDI gear to (and from) the Touch.

**Magic touch**

The most important feature of the Touch is its 7-inch high resolution full-colour, multi-touch screen. This is a first for an MPC and it's key to the Touch's solid integration with the MPC software. It also means the Touch should stay future-proof as the MPC software evolves (in comparison, the Renaissance, Studio and Element are more restricted by their interfaces/small screens). With most of us used to

**SPECS****Hardware**

7" colour multi-touch display  
16 velocity-sensitive thick, fat MPC pads with RGB backlighting  
2-in/2-out 24-bit audio interface  
Step Sequencer with touch interface  
XYFX control adds effects, adjusts sound dynamics in real time  
Phrase Looper, enables connection of any instrument to create loops  
Pad Mixer for setting levels, stereo panning and adding VST effects  
Sample Edit control, for trimming, chopping and processing your samples  
4 new, performance-ready touch-sensitive Q-Links  
Data Encoder knob, for push-and-twist control of display parameters  
Includes MPC software and over 20,000 sounds

**System requirements:**

**Mac:** OS X 10.9 or newer  
**PC:** Windows 8, Windows 10  
**Both:** 2GB free disk space for basic installation, 20GB free disk space for full content installation, 4GB RAM (8GB recommended), Dual-Core processor, 2.5GHz or better

# MPC software version 1.9 offers lots of power and has been massively improved since I reviewed it in 2012

**Q-Links And Jogwheel**

The Q-Link dials feel solid and auto-map directly to onscreen parameters/controls. They're great for editing and real-time tweaks. The jogwheel is for data entry and clicks to select too.

**Screen**

The multi-touch screen brings the MPC software directly into the hardware itself. Smartphone-like multi-touch gestures are used for zooming, tapping, pinching, event-editing and selecting. It feels snappy and is easily readable.

ALTERNATIVES



**Akai MPC Renaissance**

£729

Still Akai's flagship MPC and offers more Q-Links and a more powerful audio interface, though it now seems quite old-fashioned next to the Touch!

[www.akaipro.com](http://www.akaipro.com)



**Native Instruments Maschine**

£399

The closest alternative to Akai's MPCs, the Maschine range includes pad-laden controllers that connect to NI's powerful, computer-hosted beat-production environment.

[www.native-instruments.com](http://www.native-instruments.com)



**MPC1000/2500 with JJOS**

£400+ second-hand

Let's not forget these respected standalone hardware MPCs. Paired with JJ's much-improved OS, the MPC1000 and 2500 are still serious contenders and you don't need a computer!

eBay, gumtree etc...

multi-touch screens on our smartphones, the gestures are all second nature and it feels like a natural evolution for the MPC. Swiping, dragging, nudging, entering events, pinch/expand for zooming in/out, tapping to select and double-tapping for accessing drop-down menus (and functions that you don't want to inadvertently select) are all available with a shallow learning curve. The screen also keeps the front panel streamlined and fast to navigate which obviously speeds up workflow too.

The one caveat is that operation is now obviously very screen-centric

The Touch really does feel more like a standalone unit; it's easy to forget you're tethered to a computer

(which some people might not like), but it's a small trade-off for the very narrow gap between the software and hardware. I know many folks are still after a standalone new MPC (Akai actually showed a prototype recently of a standalone model using an embedded version of Windows to host the MPC software); but, while we wait for this potential new standalone flagship, the Touch really does feel more like a standalone unit and it's easy to forget you're tethered to a computer (well, until you move about at least!)

Importantly, the screen also reacts to touch snappily and predictably and the resolution is easy on the eyes (plus there are brightness buttons on the right side). Handily, you can even use the

Performing With The Touch

The Touch is a great piece of kit for performing live or jamming out ideas in the studio. You can use it as a MIDI controller for controlling not just the MPC software but also other DAWs and plug-ins and external MIDI hardware – the Q-Links, buttons and pads can be assigned to just about any internal or external

MIDI parameters. In addition to the Q-Links, the touchscreen is a great real-time performance surface considering all the pop-up sliders/dials in the software, the new hands-on step sequencer, the XYFX pad for real-time FX tweaks and the looper – these all come in handy for quickly spicing up performances!

Chopping and editing samples live is also now much more practical as the screen allows direct editing of sample waveforms/slices using your fingers to pinch, zoom, cut and scroll. You also still have Pad Mute for muting in and out elements, Track Mute, and Song Mode for laying out arrangements.

the new MPC models too. When you then consider the 20GB of good quality included content and the reasonable £499 price, the

Touch is now the most desirable of the current MPC controllers. I'm very impressed by the quality, innovation and features on offer. **FM**

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

**BUILD** [Progress bar: 10/10]

**VALUE** [Progress bar: 8/10]

**EASE OF USE** [Progress bar: 7/10]

**VERSATILITY** [Progress bar: 9/10]

**RESULTS** [Progress bar: 10/10]

**It narrows the gap between the software and hardware, bringing a more tactile/integrated experience.**

Pads

The new pads are very sensitive indeed, picking up on even the slightest nuances of touch. With eight banks too, there's plenty of space to drop samples, loops and more.