

Akai MPD232 Controller | £190

Akai's MPD range has just had a major refresh. **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** checks out the flagship MPD232

WHAT IS IT?

USB/MIDI controller with pads, buttons, sliders, dials, transport controls and step sequencer

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 The whole range looks and feels great and they are generally well built
- 2 The sequencer is a nice addition and the 226 and 232 also work standalone without a computer
- 3 Can be tailored to work with most DAWs and external MIDI gear too via the dedicated MIDI ports

PRICING

MPD232
£190
MPD226
£140
MPD218
£70

Akai's original MPD16 launched back in 2002. Fast forward to 2015 and Akai have sent us the new MPD2 range to check out. Here I'll be focusing on the new MPD232 with a brief look at the smaller MPD226 and 218 models.

While the outgoing MPD32 looked utilitarian, the MPD232 looks much more inviting. The larger, flatter case is made from smooth black and red plastic and surrounding the screen (which is mainly used for assigning MIDI data/CCs to the 72 assignable controls), the case morphs into shiny black perspex (unfortunately the same fingerprint and scratch-inviting type found on the recent Advance controllers

and on Roland's JD-XA synth). This plastic is also very reflective and shiny which some might find distracting, although in normal lighting conditions it shouldn't be a problem, especially as the panel writing is clear.

Build-wise things are generally solid. The endless rotary dials feel sturdy, the sliders feel tough with little wobble (and they produce smooth MIDI output), plus the yellow backlit buttons click reassuringly. One concern is that the slider tops can be pulled off and during vigorous slider sessions this could be problematic for some. In addition, none of the slider/pad/button/rotary values appear in the display when pressed/moved which is a shame – hopefully this can be addressed in an OS update.

Connection-wise, the MPD232's USB port allows the unit to be buss-powered from your computer (and there's MIDI in/out over USB too). In addition, the 232 and 226 can be powered via an optional 6V mains power adaptor (ie they work standalone), though I feel this should have been included in the £190 price – there's also nothing to clamp the wire in place so tread carefully!

There are also two further concerns. Firstly, due to the slimline case, the MIDI in/out ports (used for sending MIDI to and receiving MIDI from external MIDI gear, in addition to the USB port) are on breakout cables. This means more cables to remember for gigs, plus mini jack connections are way less sturdy – this is a disadvantage over the outgoing models with their standard DIN MIDI connections. The second concern is that the new MPD2s have no footswitch or expression pedal jacks so, if you like to sustain sounds on certain pads or add expression via pedals, you're out of luck!

Pad layout

While the outgoing MPD32 had a more familiar MPC-style layout, the 232 has the pads to the lower left and transport to the far upper left edge with all the tweakable/assignable dials, sliders and buttons (eight dials, eight buttons, eight



Above the pads are the standard Akai Pad Bank buttons (there are four pad banks here) and you'll also find MPC-style Note Repeat, plus 16 Level

(like the MPD232) and is suited to smaller spaces due to its small footprint. All the MPD2s ship with a decent software package including Akai Pro MPC Essentials and Sonivox's Big Bang Drums/Big Bang Cinema.