

Native Instruments Traktor Kontrol Z1

PC MAC

£169

A mixer/controller/audio interface for Traktor on all platforms – but can you really rock the house with your iPad?



> The birth of tablet DJing can be traced back to the launch of the iPad 2. Unlike its predecessor, Apple's second 9" touchscreen slab offered sufficient processing juice to comfortably handle the kind of timestretching algorithms and virtual mixing functionality required for effective digital DJing, and a number of developers leapt at the opportunity to make DJ apps for it. Notable by their absence from the scrum, however, were Native Instruments – the biggest brand in digital DJing – who didn't launch their Traktor DJ apps for iPad and iPhone until spring/summer of this year. Still, at least it hasn't taken them that long to release an accompanying hardware controller/mixer/audio interface for it: say a big hello to the Traktor Kontrol Z1.

Anybody who's used any of the current generation of NI controllers knows how great they feel: the knobs are firm, the performance buttons are eminently bash-able, the mode and function buttons click reassuringly, and all are beautifully backlit with RGB LEDs. The Z1 is no exception. This two-channel mixer and 24-bit audio interface perfectly complements the simple and intuitive Traktor DJ, as well as sitting comfortably alongside its X1 and F1 stablemates for use with Traktor Pro 2 on Mac and PC. Each channel features 3-band EQ controls and level faders, headphone cue buttons, and a Filter/FX knob that can be toggled between filter cutoff

and one-knob effect control in Traktor DJ, or high- and low-resonance filters in Traktor Pro 2. Beyond that, you get a crossfader, Cue Mix and Volume dials, a master level knob, stereo phono outs for connecting to speakers or a mixer, and a minijack headphone output – essentially nothing more or less than you would want and expect in a meat-and-potatoes DJ mixer.

Catching some Z

Though clearly not in any way groundbreaking, the Z1 does actually represent a bit of a game-changer: it's the first piece of DJ hardware designed to be compatible with Mac, PC and iOS devices – and it's equally proficient with all three. Suddenly your iPad becomes just as viable (and far more portable and less expensive to replace when a drunken reveller spills their pint on it) for DJing as your laptop. While there is still a puzzling level of stigma to DJing with an iPad – a perceived lack of professionalism, presumably – the Z1 could (and should) shatter this stereotype. The big question is whether or not it heralds the imminent arrival of true scratch control on an iPad. Perhaps that particular dream will require a new, more powerful tablet, but surely it's the next step. It'll also be interesting to see how long it takes NI to extend the Z1/Traktor DJ combo to Android phones and tablets.

One thing we would have appreciated is the ability to daisy chain the Z1 and X1 via an extra

USB port on each, but that really is our only gripe. Ultimately, the Traktor Z1 offers absolutely no surprises, but neither does your favourite meal served to perfection in a solid gold bowl. It's simple but superb and an undeniable landmark. If you own an iPad and DJ with it from time to time, the Z1 is a near-essential purchase. And if you use Traktor with a laptop (which we also tried alongside NI's excellent new X1 Mk2, with great results) and occasionally DJ at venues without their own mixer, then the Traktor Kontrol Z1 is, likewise, practically essential. **cm**

Web www.native-instruments.com

Alternatively

IK Multimedia iRig Mix
cm180 » 8/10 » €75

A great analogue mixer for iOS DJing, and much cheaper, but not in the same league as the Z1

Numark iDJ Live II
N/A » N/A » £99

Cheaper and with scratch control, but doesn't compete with the Z1 in terms of build, style or versatility

Verdict

For Great build quality and featureset
Excellent sound
Mac/PC/iOS compatible
USB powering

Against No chaining of other USB Traktor devices

Utterly essential if you ever use Traktor DJ on iPhone or iPad, and recommended to users of NI's Mac/PC DJ applications, too

10/10

Power sharing

One difference between using the Traktor Kontrol Z1 with an iOS device or a computer is that your iPad or iPhone isn't capable of putting out enough juice to power it from the battery. Thankfully, though, the Z1 actually acts as a charger for your iOS device, so you only need one power point to run both. You simply plug the Z1 into the mains, which in turn charges the iPad/iPhone via its dock/Lightning port. This should represent no great change for iPad

DJs, as anybody mad enough to go gigging on an iPad without plugging it in deserves the inevitable grinding halt that lies ahead.

Do be aware, though, that the Z1's bundled cables comprise a standard USB A-to-USB B for computer hook-up and an unusual USB B-to-30-pin Dock Connector cable for plugging into Apple's mobile devices, so if you're using an iPhone 5, iPad 4 or iPad mini you'll need to budget for a Dock-to-Lightning adapter as well.