



What is it? MIDI pad controller

PRICE: £139

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# KORG padKontrol

Sick of recording your beats on a keyboard? With the latest addition to their Kontrol series, Korg are looking to make drum programming fun...

## ► SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

**PC:** Windows XP, USB port

**Mac:** Mac OS X 10.2 or later, USB port

## ► TEST MACHINE

**PC:** P4 3.2GHz, 1GB RAM, Windows XP

**W**hile there are enough USB MIDI keyboards on the market to fill a swimming pool the size of Belgium, drum pad-based controllers are a different matter. The last one we encountered was M-Audio's Trigger Finger (**cm**88, 9/10), and prior to that we'd only seen Akai's somewhat disappointing MPD16 (**cm**52, 6/10).

Sensing that there's a gap in the market, Japanese giants Korg have

weighed in with the padKontrol. This joins the family of controllers that already contains the Kontrol49 and the microKontrol, but instead of offering a keyboard, knobs and sliders, it features 16 drum pads (à la Akai's MPC series). It's got pedigree, then, but how does it feel under the fingers?

## Tap to the future

The first thing you notice about the padKontrol is its pleasing appearance.

The sensible, attractive design, compact form and lovely reflective surfaces conspire to create one of the best looking controllers we've ever seen. The unit's head-turning looks won't make your music sound any better, obviously, but Korg should still be commended for producing what is a very finely turned out and well-finished piece of hardware.

Installing the device is a simple affair. As you'd hope, it's USB-powered,

## Silver screen show a Scene

The Editor Librarian is a fairly simple bit of software that enables users to prefabricate their own controller Scenes via a point-and-click interface. When you click on the pad (or other control) that you want to edit, all of its tweakable parameters are shown in a window.

For the all-important pads you can dictate the MIDI note you want to output, the type of velocity curve, whether the note is a trigger or toggle command, and the MIDI channel that the information should be sent on. The Flam and Roll settings can also be customised in this section, as can the XY pad and optional footswitch.

The unit comes preloaded with Scenes for the likes of Battery, Guru, BFD, Live and GarageBand, but if you need to knock up your own patch and can't be bothered with the Editor Librarian, comprehensive Scene editing is possible on the hardware itself. While this method might be a little more difficult than the software one, once you get the hang of it, you can change the controller's setup extremely quickly. This will almost certainly be the preferred option for those who are using the unit live.



▲ The Editor Librarian: not nearly as dull as it sounds!

### ► ALTERNATIVELY

**M-Audio Trigger Finger**  
cm88 » **9/10** » £169

More knobs and sliders, but not nearly as sexy as the padKontrol

**Akai MPD16**  
cm52 » **6/10** » £149

Disappointing. Hopefully, the forthcoming MPD24 will be better

so one cable is all you need to get up and running. If you'd rather connect it up in a more traditional manner, you can use the MIDI In and Out ports and the 9-volt DC adaptor socket.

The padKontrol comes preloaded with a selection of templates (known as 'Scenes'), which are designed for use with a number of different bits of music software. Some of these Scenes work with the programs that come in the supplied Creative Kontrol Pack Vol 2 – this contains cut-down versions of Reason, Live, and SampleTank 2, the full version of the excellent MDE-X effects suite, and a Korg-flavoured drum ROMpler called UVI Korg Edition. On top of that, there's also a light edition of ToonTrack's dhf Superior virtual drum kit.

The final piece of the bundled software jigsaw is the padKontrol Editor Librarian. This enables you to create your own Scenes and send them to the unit's memory using a point-and-click interface. It's very straightforward to use, though the ease with which you can change the padKontrol's parameters on the hardware itself means that many users will find it unnecessary (see the *Silver screen show a Scene* box for more on this).

## Finger hitting good

It doesn't take long to get the hang of working with the padKontrol. First, you have to choose a Scene – this is done by holding down the Scene button and tapping one of the 16 pads. If you haven't already got a Scene for your

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instrument of choice, you can edit one of the existing setups by pressing the Setting button and tapping one of the pads. Once you've done this, the Setting Section knob can be used to change the MIDI note being output by the chosen pad.

This system works extremely well and enables you to quickly set up each pad without having to load up the Editor Librarian. It's also indicative of the no-nonsense functionality that makes this an ideal tool for the live musician.

The padKontrol is packed with great little touches. Each pad can have its own velocity curve or fixed velocity level, there are two assignable knobs for sending MIDI CC data, and – most excitingly – there's an XY pad built in that gives you access to some unique features.

To the right of the pad are three buttons: Hold, Flam and Roll. While this trio may sound like an ill-advised strategy for dealing with an unexpected nuclear attack, they're actually extremely handy when you're trying to emulate the kind of drum playing techniques that would normally require far more dexterity than most of us have available to us in our index fingers. When activated, the Flam and

Roll buttons automatically trigger a double hit or drum roll respectively on the drum pad you tap or hold at the same time. The XY pad can be used at the same time to dynamically control the speed and intensity of the flam or roll, but if you find yourself running out of fingers, you can simply tap the Hold button to keep it set at a fixed level.

## Pad world

As you can see, the padKontrol has plenty of tricks up its sleeves, but perhaps the best news is that it's also great fun to play. The drum pads respond superbly (and light up excitedly) when tapped, and the XY pad is a great idea that's been well implemented.

When compared to The Trigger Finger, the padKontrol comes up a little short in some respects (there's no aftertouch-style pressure sensitivity, no sliders and fewer knobs, for example), but from a performance point of view, it's at least its equal. The design and build are both top notch, and the price is reasonable when you consider the device's quality. If you're looking for a fun and simple way to play drum patterns into your computer, check this one out. **cm**

## VERDICT

### FOR

- + Easy on the eye
- + Great build quality
- + Fabulous XY pad
- + Easily accessible editing features
- + Good software bundle

### AGAINST

- Not pressure-sensitive
- Fewer knobs than the competition

The padKontrol has the performance to back up its eye-catching good looks. We suspect that Korg will shift quite a few of these

### RATING

