

Akai LPD8 & LPK25 | £45

Hot on the heels of Korg come these mini controllers. *Greg Scarth* gets his man-size hands on 'em...

WHAT IS IT?

Mini keyboard controller and mini pad controller with rotaries

CONTACT

Who: Akai
Tel: +44 (0)1252 341 400
Web: akaipro.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 LPD offers MPC-style pads and eight assignable rotary pots
- 2 LPK's mini keys hide built-in arpeggiator
- 3 Better build quality than Korg Nano controllers

SPECS

Plug and play USB connection for Mac and PC. USB bus-powered operation

LPK25

Dimensions
339 x 97 x 33mm
Weight
40 grams

LPD8

Dimensions
310 x 80 x 28mm
Weight
34g

Since their launch last year, it's fair to say that Korg's nano series of mini controllers have taken the world by storm.

This brand new duo of Akai controllers will inevitably draw comparisons with their Korg counterparts, offering high-quality DAW/DJ software control in a tiny package. Korg themselves are so concerned about the Akai controllers that they've slashed retail prices across the board. Clearly this competition is starting to hot up so let's take a look at what Akai are bringing to the table.

Small is beautiful

The LPD8 Laptop Pad Controller slots in somewhere between Korg's nanoPad and Nanokontroller, with eight MPC-style pads and eight rotary pots, all of which have a 270-degree sweep rather than being infinitely adjustable 360-degree rotary encoders.

Obviously the LPD doesn't have the XY touchpad of the nanoPad or the faders of the nanoKontrol, meaning that a lot of the decision here will come down to personal choice in terms of

what you need to improve your workflow. Either way, the versatility of the LPD will make it suitable for controlling a wide variety of software.

The LPK25 Laptop Performance Keyboard is slightly larger than the Nanokey but offers the significant advantage of having much more realistic piano-style keys with a nicer feel than the Korg's flattened low-profile keys. Other than that, the overall idea is pretty similar, but the LPK's 25-key velocity sensitive keyboard does have another trick up its sleeve in the form of a built-in arpeggiator. Like the LPD8, it sends MIDI over USB and requires no external power or batteries.

How do they work?

Ridiculously, Akai have supplied the software for both units on 80mm mini CDs. Obviously this is in keeping with the miniaturisation theme, but it means that anyone with a slot-loading CD drive will need to make a trip to the Akai website to download the files.

The software isn't actually required to use the controllers but comes in

handy for programming and recalling setups. In use, the build quality of both units appears to be quite a bit higher than their Korg equivalents, with a sturdier, more stable feel.

The LPD's pads are almost identical in use to those of the MPC range, with a sensitive touch that makes it easy to trigger hits at a range of velocities. Although the keys are small and may be fiddly if you have big hands, the LPK is perfectly acceptable for coming up with ideas or playing simple parts. The arpeggiator is simple but effective, creating a variety of melodic patterns with minimal effort.

My only major gripe with either unit is that the knobs on the LPD's rotary pots are too short, meaning that they're difficult to grab hold of. It's understandable that Akai have tried to keep the overall size of the unit down, but when you combine the knobs' size with their lack of knurled sides, it makes them much more fiddly to turn than they really need to be.

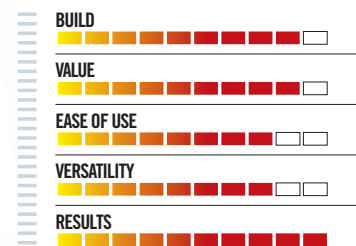
Conclusions

There are dozens of potential uses for the LPK25 and LPD8. The LPD8 in particular offers a handy combination of pads and rotaries which make it ideally suited for use alongside controllers such as Akai's own APC40 or Novation's Launchpad. A further use would be to line the LPD8 up alongside a DJ software controller like the Vestax VCI-100, controlling effects, cueing, adjusting BPM or whatever you choose to map it to. Either way, the versatility that the LPD8 brings to the table makes it the pick of this pair for my money.

There are probably various minor improvements that Akai could make but ultimately at this price it's hard to argue. Those seeking more features should look elsewhere but the convenience, build quality and value for money on offer here make the Akai mini controllers seriously attractive. **FM**



FutureMusic VERDICT



Akai's offerings provide seriously stiff competition in the increasingly packed mini controller market.