

Novation £160 Launch Control XL

PC MAC

Designed to complement the Launchpad S, this slick new controller could make operating Ableton Live's mixer a breeze

> A member of Novation's Launch range of dedicated MIDI controllers for Ableton Live, the Launch Control XL expands on the original Launch Control - which featured a rather meagre eight pads and 16 knobs - to make a more fitting companion unit to the Launchpad S. The two are the same size, and the XL does for Live's Mixer what the S did for Clip launching, offering plenty of hands-ons control in a straightforward, compact unit.

First impressions are great: the Launch Control XL's roughly 9.5" square plastic casing feels surprisingly rugged, and its natty orange rubber base should help defend it somewhat from the rigours of life on the road. The face of the unit features 24 knobs, eight faders, 16 pads and ten buttons, and the build quality throughout is absolutely top notch - although the knobs might be a touch stiff for some. You also get a USB cable in the box, as well as 1GB of Loopmasters samples and Ableton Live Lite.

Being a class-compliant device, installation couldn't be easier: simply plug it in. The XL is divided into eight channels, each with a volume fader, knobs for Pan, Send A and Send B, a Track Focus button and a Track Control button. Pressing Track Focus on a channel selects that channel's strip in Live, as if you'd clicked on it, while Track Control has three modes of operation, selected using the buttons on the

right-hand side of the unit: Mute, Solo and Record Arm - it's all very straightforward.

My selector

The Track Select buttons jump the whole controller between banks of eight channels in Live: 1-8, 9-16, 17-24 and so on. The Device modifier button switches the Pan knobs into Device mode, under which they control eight of the currently selected plugin's parameters. Further parameters can then be accessed by holding down the Device button, which turns the Track Control pads into Device Bank selectors, each with its own Pan/Device knob assignments. In the case of EQ Eight, for example, the first bank sees the knobs controlling each band's on/off state, the second band frequency, the third band Gain, and so on. This setup would be much better if the Send A and Send B knobs could also be used for device control, but as it stands, the only way to get access to all of the controls is to create a user template - see *Template of Dreams*.

When held, the Device button also turns the Track Select buttons into Device Select buttons, which cycle through the instruments and effects on the currently selected track. So, once you've got the hang of how the modifiers work, you can select any device on any track and tweak its parameters without touching your mouse or keyboard. There are also two Send Select

buttons for selecting which sends in Live the Send A and Send B knobs control.

The Launch Control XL is a very well thought-out controller that packs a lot into its relatively tiny surface area. The sturdy design makes it ideal for live performance, but it's quite at home as a mixing tool in the studio too. It feels like a bit of a missed opportunity that the Send knobs can't be used to control device parameters like the Pan knobs can, but that's certainly not enough of an issue to prevent us giving it our wholehearted recommendation. **cm**

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Alternatively

Akai APC40 MkII cm210 » 7/10 » £290

Combines mixer and clip control - though we'd say get the MkI version, if you can find it

Korg nanoKONTROL2 N/A » N/A » £40

This mini controller is hard to beat for the price, and its size makes it ideal for the mobile musician

Verdict

For Painless to set up

Solid build quality, sensibly designed
Ableton Live Lite included
Editor software adds flexibility

Against The ability to modify Send knobs would have been useful
Can't modify knobs at all in User mode

The Launch Control XL is a brilliant controller for Ableton Live and is perfectly usable for other applications, too

9/10

Template of dreams

The Launch Control XL has eight Factory and eight User template slots, swappable by holding the User or Factory button then tapping a Track Control pad. At the time of writing, only two of the factory templates are actually used, set up to work with Ableton Live and FL Studio.

There's no guaranteed support for other DAWs, but it's possible to create your own User templates with the included Launch Control XL Editor software. This is very easy

to use: just click a control on the graphical representation of the hardware and assign a MIDI note or CC number to it (along with maximum and minimum values), select a MIDI channel, and even change its LED colour in the case of the knobs, if you wish.

Such setups can't be as involved as the Factory presets, because the Device modifier button is inactive in User templates, but their presence is still a welcome addition to the overall package.

