



Nektar Pacer

£200 PC MAC

This amazing MIDI pedalboard wants you to let your feet do the talking when it comes to controlling your live and studio projects

> Taking a cue from the guitarist's effects pedalboard, Pacer is a bank of ten MIDI footswitches (plus an additional one for literally stepping through presets) that serves as a blank canvas for creating your own DAW, plugin and hardware control schemes.

Picking up the Pacer

The 50x23cm metal unit is supremely sturdy and reassuringly heavy (3.5Kg). The switches feel great underfoot and the unit is class-compliant and USB bus-powered – although a power supply is provided for use via the 5-pin DIN output with non-USB gear. A rotary push encoder facilitates programming, and the LED readouts above each switch give three lines of info and feedback. These are simply backlit stencils primarily showing Track and Transport switch functions (see below), although the colours of the status bar elements can be changed. MIDI message type (CCs, Aftertouch, note numbers, etc) and values are displayed in the alphanumeric red LED above the encoder.

As well as power, USB and MIDI DIN, the back panel houses quarter-inch sockets for adding two expression pedals, four footswitches and four relay outputs for controlling effects and other settings on non-MIDI guitar amps.

There are 24 editable presets onboard, including a handful of keyboardist orientated setups, but mostly catering to various guitar-

related devices: Line6 Pod and Helix, Kemper Profiler, Electro Harmonix 45000 Looper, etc. For DAW control, though, Pacer works via an integration software layer for Bitwig Studio, Cubase, Logic, GarageBand, Nuendo, Reaper, Studio One and Reason, or the Mackie Control Universal protocol, with four of the top row switches flipping between Track and Transport modes, and stepping through tracks.

In Track mode, the bottom six switches operate Solo, Mute, Record Arm, Click on/off and next/previous preset for the currently selected plugin. In Transport mode, they control playback, cycle on/off, record, etc. Annoyingly, however, in Ableton Live, Track mode doesn't do anything apart from toggling QWERTY keyboard MIDI input. All 24 presets leave the top row switches assigned as just described, although they can be overwritten (presets are also changed by holding down the Preset switch, and selecting with the other switches); and the Preset switch returns from either DAW mode to the current preset. Thus, dancing backwards and forwards between presets and DAW control is effortless. It's a very clever system.

Feet don't fail me now

Pacer is a revelation – endlessly flexible, incredibly powerful, totally reliable and great fun to work with. There's really no limit to the MIDI-assignable things you can do with it:

activate and bypass effects, start and stop recording in looper plugins, trigger clips and Scenes in Live or Bitwig Studio, switch patterns in a step sequencer, send MIDI notes to trigger drones and basslines, configure a whole live set's worth of plugins... anything that can be done via MIDI signalling, basically.

Obviously it's more relevant to the live performer than the producer, but the ability to control DAW transport and mixer functions in the studio with your feet might well be worth the price of admission alone. Our only criticism is that it's not much fun to program, so hopefully a software editor is in the works. **cm**

Web www.nektartech.com

Alternatively

Behringer FCB1010
NA » NA » £117

Not as powerful or programmable, but includes two expression pedals

KMI SoftStep 2

NA » NA » \$300

Space-age pressure/position-sensitive pedalboard

Verdict

For A live performance gamechanger
Frees your hands up in the studio
Versatile and deeply programmable
Easily expandable via extra pedals
Relay outputs for guitar amps

Against Really needs a software editor
Track mode doesn't do much in Live

If you perform live with your laptop and/or MIDI hardware, Pacer is utterly essential. In the studio, it's less so, but still very useful

9/10

Get with the program

The extent to which Pacer can be programmed is truly impressive, although the old-skool single-knob-and-alphanumeric-display interface is a chore to use.

Each switch (and the encoder, outside edit mode) can output any of a range of MIDI messages – all CCs, note, NRPN, Program Change, Pitchbend and Aftertouch. A switch can be configured to send up to six MIDI messages at a press, either at the same time or in a sequence, advancing through them

with repeated presses of the switch in question or one of the others. Ingeniously, each preset can also be assigned up to 16 messages that fire when it's loaded, so a preset dedicated to a particular song, say, could activate and/or bypass multiple plugins when called up. Individual presets can be assigned to switches, too, for easy stepping between specific setups, enabling incorporation of pre-planned transitions through presets into the presets themselves.