

Novation Launchkey Mini Mk3 £100

After last year's SL update, Novation show their budget controller some love. **Si Truss** takes a look at what's new

CONTACT WHO: Novation **WEB:** novationmusic.com **KEY FEATURES** MIDI controller with 25-note mini keyboard, 16 performance pads, eight rotaries. **I/O:** USB for host computer/power, 3.5mm MIDI port; required adapter sold separately





THE PROS & CONS



Compact and well-built

Great arpeggiator and chord modes

Components makes configuration easy



MIDI adapter isn't included with it

Last year saw Novation overhaul their flagship controller keyboards with an excellent Mk3 update for their SL line. Now the UK brand are turning their

attention to the other end of their controller line, with a refined version of the ultra-compact Launchkey Mini.

As with its predecessors, the Mini is a combined keyboard and pad device designed for plug-and-play use primarily with Ableton Live. The hardware itself is very compact and neat, with a width around the size of an average laptop and lightweight feel meaning you could easily chuck it into a bag and barely notice it. Size aside though, the Launchkey Mini feels fairly rugged and the layout design doesn't feel too cramped.

Novation have updated the 25-note mini keyboard itself, and the results are one of the nicest sets of keys we've tried on a controller this size. The pitch and mod strips sat to the top left are a nice touch for a device this size too. The bank of 16 velocity-sensitive pads is equally well-placed, offering plenty of room to tap out drum patterns across the Mini's compact interface. The one hardware element that does feel a little pokey is the set of rotaries along its top edge – they are a little fiddly, although not problematic.

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The Launchkey Mini is built mainly with Ableton Live use in mind, offering plug-and-play control over a good selection of the DAW's features. This includes the ability to play Drum Racks using the pads, tweak device parameters with the rotaries, launch Clips and Scenes and adjust mixer parameters. There's solid integration with other DAWs too, including Reason and Logic, and Novation's browser-based Components system makes it easy to configure the device's MIDI messages.

Two of the Launchkey Mini's best features come from the hardware itself, in the onboard arp and fixed chord modes. The former has multiple modes, timing divisions, rhythmic patterns and a four-octave range. There's also a Mutate mode that can auto-generate variations. Fixed Chord, meanwhile, lets users define chord shapes and then trigger them up and down the keyboard.

There's a MIDI output port too, which lets the Launchkey Mini operate in standalone mode for use with hardware with the arp and chord

modes available. Sadly, this requires an adapter that doesn't come with the box and, due to a change in format to adhere to a new industry standard, existing Novation adapters for Launchpad Pro or Circuit synths are not compatible.

This aside, the Launchkey Mini is an excellent compact controller whether used with Ableton Live or not. A tidy free plugin bundle sweetens the deal for beginner producers, while more experienced users will appreciate this as a tool for production on the go. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.7

A compact and well-made controller, great with or without Ableton Live