



# Novation PC MAC Launchkey Mk3 £var

Novation's third incarnation of the Launchkey has a lot going for it if you are a Live user (and the smallest almost offers the most)

> The original Novation Launchkey arrived back in 2013, a solid and great value-for-money controller for both desktop and iPad and one which we concluded was, 'possibly the best controller keyboard in its price bracket'. The Mk 2 version came out in 2016 and - with 16 launch pads corresponding in colour to those of the clips in Ableton's Session view - became a bit of a steal for Live users. Now at Mk 3 stage, and with 'create and perform with Ableton Live' writ large on the box, Launchkey appears now to be a Live-only controller.

## Look a-Live

It's not, of course - even the most dedicated MIDI controllers will work, to varying degrees with any DAW, and Novation confirm this by saying "Launchkey also has full integration with Logic and Reason, plus out of the box functionality with other DAWs including Studio One, Cubase and Pro Tools, via HUI". But there's no getting away from the fact that integration here with Live is, as they say, 'deep'.

The keyboard comes in four sizes: 25, 27, 49 and 61 keys and we have the 37 on test here. (For more on the range, see below.) The unit is light but solid, bus-powered and features a very playable full-sized keyboard. Power it up and you'll be directed to the Novation website to register and download a good number of freebies from the likes of AAS, XLN Audio,

Klevgrand and Spitfire - top marks for the bundle overall. Less than top marks for the Getting Started process that took us to the odd dead page, but thankfully the user instructions PDF guides you nicely through things, and setting up with Live is pretty straightforward. Soon we are pretty quickly stepping through tracks, launching clips and scenes, muting, soloing and mixing levels faster than ever. We're not even in that deep yet and it's become very apparent that Launchkey and Live go hand-in-hand like some kind of dream couple. Truly a joyous combination to use.

## Key to the castle

Pressing the Shift button allows you to switch between different Launchkey modes. There are some for mixing and one to put the 'board in Session view. Hit Shift and Drum and the pads will turn into velocity-sensitive drum pads. Press Shift and Scale Chord and Launchkey's all-new Scale mode comes to life and the pads become different chords in whatever key you have selected - very nicely implemented and a great source of songwriting ideas. Two other Chord modes plus the new Scale option allow you to explore this further and are welcome additions for players and non players alike, as is the arpeggiator which is incredibly easy to use and, like the previous modes, works well with the small but clear screen.

Just time to try Launchkey with Logic - as it comes with integration for Apple's DAW too - and we're pleased to report that it does a decent job although you have to download a Logic Script installer for the DAW to pick Launchkey up as a control surface.

The chord and scale extras alone make Launchkey a far more creative tool than your bog standard keyboard controller, and the overall quality of the hardware, its brilliant Live integration and decent software bundle make this a great overall controller package with one to suit every price and space. **cm**

**Web** [novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)

## Alternatively

**IK Multimedia iRig Keys Pro**  
**€183**

A cheap, 37-key controller with full-sized keys. More compact, but far fewer controls

**Akai MPK range**  
**£179-£353**

A range with full-sized keys (25 to 61) and pads. Expensive but comes with the excellent VIP software

## Verdict

**For** Great Scale & Chord modes  
Lovely Ableton Live partnership  
(But does work with other DAWs despite the claims!)

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Great hardware build and soft bundle

**Against** Website page links missing  
Price hike for the bigger models

Once you are up and running with Launchkey and (particularly) Live it's a workflow marriage made in heaven

9/10

## Size differences

**Due to their size differences, some of the controllers in the Launchkey range will let you do more things with your software than others. "Duh, that's obvious," you might say and, yes, those extra keys let you play more octaves, but on an Ableton Live level, the bigger keyboards offer some added extras. The LK49 and LK61, for example, both feature track faders, an additional master volume fader and track select buttons, all of which do come in handy and aid Ableton workflow.**

**However, the Launchkey you choose will be very much up to what space you have and what budget - as the price differences across the board are quite marked. The 25, for example, is currently streeting for just £94, which is fantastic value for a full size key controller of this power. You're looking at a big hike to £260 for the 61-note and £209 for the 49. The 37, on test, is a reasonable £173 but whichever way you look at it, that 25 looks like easily the best value of the bunch.**