

Native Instruments Kontrol X1 | €199

NI finally release their own branded Traktor controller. *Declan McGlynn* finds out if it's worth the wait

WHAT IS IT?
An official Traktor controller from NI

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HIGHLIGHTS
1 Lots of visual feedback
2 No mapping required
3 Small footprint



You'd be forgiving for thinking that NI's first attempt at a controller for their über-popular DJing software would be along the lines of Akai's APC40 – replicating the software's GUI and strongest features in hardware, making the visual feedback recognisable and the layout logical. But you'd be far off the mark – NI have, for better or for worse, squarely aimed their product at one sector of their market – timecode vinyl and CD users. While this makes sense as a business choice – NI need to associate themselves with currently installed professional club systems and equipment if they are to truly become a standard – it is odd to completely remove the ability, or at least make it very difficult, to use the X1 away from these scenarios. That being said, NI have admitted it's not the first controller we'll see from them, so let's assess the X1 in the context it was designed for.

Dimension X1

Anyone who is familiar with NI's excellent groovebox Maschine will instantly recognise the look and feel of the X1 – it's black metal sheen and rubberised buttons has a satisfying and reassuring feel and it definitely feels like it will take a beating on the road and in the club. Once the unit is plugged in, like Maschine, it glows an array of colours from its backlit buttons and instantly works with the new version of Traktor – not a MIDI map in sight.

The X1's size and shape are designed to sit alongside a standard hardware mixer – not unlike Allen & Heath's Xone:1D. Unlike the 1D though, the X1 squeezes in complete control of two decks into a tiny footprint, and does so quite remarkably.

The X1 is laid out fairly logically, with the effects and transport sections being of main interest. The effects section is comprehensive to say the least with a total of twenty-eight controls for what is essentially a fairly simple element of Traktor. Along with the standard effects on/off buttons and amount knobs, NI have included a Dry/Wet knob, a global on/off button each effects channel as well as Shift functions to cycle through effects.

NI have also taken the questionable decision to label each of the on/off buttons and knobs with three of the



most popular DJ effects: Delay, Reverb and Filter. It's up to you how much of an annoyance this could be – personally I found it initially confusing but after some reshuffling, I got used to it and it does make sense.

Conveniently, hitting Shift and FX On will make these labelled effects active on that channel so if you have gone crazy with effects selection you can reset it to the defaults with one click and start again.

On rotation

There are four endless stepped rotaries on the X1, with the first two controlling

controls loop length and clicking it down controls loop on/off. This is nothing revolutionary but is a genius move by NI to give intuitive and fairly comprehensive control over looping, with a single knob. The X1's transport controls finish off the unit, with a total of 16 buttons that double-up as cue triggers when the Hotcue button is active as well as having multiple Shift-functions.

At this point I must admit that Shift functions have always been the bane of controllers – not only does it require multiple mappings and, sometimes, a photographic memory, the jumping in

Hotcue mode attempting to launch an unassigned cue. The only visual reference for this mode is a slight change in shades of blue depending on your cues and an illuminated Hotcue button. It would have been nice to see a change of colour to avoid confusion – double-mapping buttons such as Play, Stop and Cue needs to be treated with clarity to avoid errors and I don't feel like the X1 makes it obvious enough.

Focus right

If you're an in-the-box DJ, it's more than likely you will find the X1 to be lacking, with no velocity or pitch controls and no

crossfader, making its 199 Euro price tag a lot less appealing for what is essentially a small part of your potential setup. That being said, touring DJs who

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browser selection and loading with a click while it's Shift-functions provide track-seeking and view-changing i.e. making the browser temporarily fullscreen. Scrolling through the browser works perfectly and loading is swift but the track-seeking resolution could be a little less extreme. The other two rotaries control looping in a very intuitive manner – turning the knob

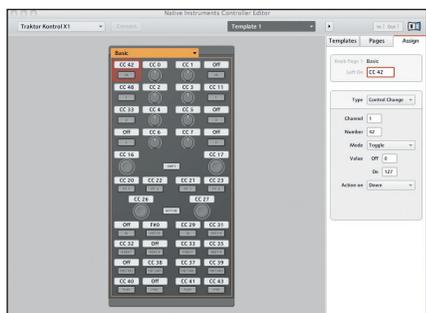
and out of different 'pages' does nothing for your flow and focus when performing. This is obviously something NI are very aware of and they've worked hard to label the X1 where appropriate while still maintaining a clear layout.

This is the case for everything but the Hotcue function – I repeatedly found myself panicking when a track won't play only to discover that I was in

are looking for a hardware addition to their current timecode-based Traktor setup will fall in love with the X1. What it really excels in is intuitive control: everything does what it feels like it should and it only takes a few minutes before you become very comfortable – something I found myself saying when reviewing Traktor Pro last year. In its context, the X1 delivers maximum performance and is one of the most instinctive controllers I've ever used. In-the-box DJs will need to hold out (X2?) but anyone craving a slim solution to sit alongside club installs need to check it out. It just makes sense. **FM**

Controller Editor

The launch of NI's Maschine saw the introduction of Control Editor – a comprehensive editing software for all of NI hardware controllers. For the X1, the options are straightforward but thorough – each button's CC number can be changed, it's type selected (i.e. CC, Note, Pitchbend etc etc), channel number, mode (i.e. toggle, trigger, gate or inc), it's value between 0 and 127 changed and when the action of the button



occurs decided (i.e. on pressing or on releasing). Similar options are available for the rotaries, which makes Controller

Editor incredibly useful and stretches the cost of the X1 quite a bit, if you take the time to map it for other jobs.

SPECS

Windows: XP (SP2, 32-bit), Vista (SP1, 32-bit, 64-bit), Windows 7 (32-bit, 64-bit), Pentium IV or Athlon 1.4GHz (SSE1), 1GB RAM

Mac: OS X 10.5, Mac OS X 10.6, G4 1.4 GHz or Intel Core Duo 1.66 GHz, 1GB RAM

Controls: Four endless, clickable rotaries, eight 270° knobs, 30 back-lit assignable buttons.

Dimensions: 120 x 52 x 294mm

Weight: 691g

ALTERNATIVES



Allen & Heath Xone:1D

£199

Similarly-priced with a single jog wheel and faders but nowhere near the visual feedback offered from the X1. Worth a look if you're dedicated to in-the-box DJing.

xone.co.uk



Vestax VFX-1

£199

Two channels of effects control, designed for Serato and for use alongside the VCI-300, the VFX-1 is lacking for the price when compared to the X1. Suitable if you're a Serato user, though.

vestax.com

FutureMusic VERDICT

