

Novation Launch Control XL | £160

The Launchpad gets a new partner, and the Launch Control gets super sized. **Martin Delaney** checks out this Ableton-focused mixing tool

WHAT IS IT?

Dedicated mixer type controller for Ableton Live

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 The classic mixer layout still makes sense

2 Same footprint as Launchpad – and it's slimline as well

3 Total no-brainer to get it going with Live

SPECS

24 rotary pots with multi-colour LEDs

24 assignable buttons with multi-colour LEDs

Eight 60mm faders

Two template buttons

Kensington slot

Requires Mac OS X 10.8 or higher, Windows 7 or higher

Requires Live 9.1.3 or higher

No drivers need to be installed; there is a free editor application

The Launch Control XL is a dedicated mixer-format controller for Ableton Live, with the same footprint as

Novation's Launchpad S. That information alone will send many of you running out to grab one!

Most Live controllers focus on pads – for drum and keyboard parts, and launching clips and scenes. However, there's more to music production than pressing little coloured squares; we need mixer controls as well. The all-time classic USB MIDI mixer was the Evolution UC33e, from 2004. Many people still use it, while maybe wishing there was something sleeker, and with better support for Live's instant mapping. Enter the LC XL...

Ready for take off...

Other than the XL, the slim box contains a registration card for Live Lite, and a 1GB sample pack from Loopmasters. You don't need drivers, although you should download the Launch Control XL Editor software. The box also includes

an eye poppingly-orange 1.5m USB cable, with the now-familiar right angle connector at the XL end. A quick start guide, an Ableton Live guide, and a programmer's guide are downloadable.

No surprises as far as build quality goes. You can tell it's related to the Launchpad, and that's good. The XL's clearly a mixer – there are three rows of eight knobs (each with an unobtrusive centre detent, a little 'stop' to help get your controls centred quickly), eight faders, and 26 buttons. At the right is a Kensington lock slot, and at the left is a full-size USB connector.

The top two rows of knobs correspond to Sends A and B, with the third row switchable between pan or device control; I would've preferred it to default to Sends C instead of pan. The faders handle track volume and a group of buttons change the function of the lower track buttons between mute, solo, record arm, and device select – the top row remain dedicated to track select. There are two buttons for send select, for when you have more than two return

tracks in your Live set, and also left/right track buttons, to navigate sets with more than eight tracks. The track select buttons show pale yellow for 'standard' state, bright yellow for selected track, and off if no track present. According to the assigned function, the lower buttons change colour, for example being green for solo mode and red for record mode.

Apart from the Live one, there are seven other factory presets (on MIDI channels 9-16), which can't be overwritten, and eight user presets (on channels 1-8), which can. Customisation is achieved through the Editor software, with full MIDI assignability for each control, as well as options for LED colour behaviours.

Ground control

The layout works; nothing feels cramped. Being such a no-frills design, it doesn't take long to get used to it; the only learning curve involved is getting faster at using the buttons to navigate tracks, or sends, or devices. The rubber base keeps it from sliding around the table, and the small footprint helps it find a place in your existing set-up.

Using the XL with the Launchpad makes perfect sense. The Launchpad handles, well, launching, or any esoteric functions you've assigned to user mode, while the XL provides the hands-on mixer behaviour. The XL also supports FL Studio, but no other DAWs at the moment. I'd love a fast way to get this going with Logic Pro. I should mention that it's possible to put the XL into low-power mode and connect it to an iPad (camera connection kit required).

If Novation add more DAW templates, the XL faces a long life as a versatile MIDI mixer. For Ableton users, it addresses the lack of a serious Arrangement View mixer in Live's interface. Used with the Launchpad, the XL is a total no-brainer. As I said, music production isn't all about pads; we crave more control, and here it is. **FM**

**FutureMusic** **VERDICT**

BUILD



	VALUE
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EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



For the Ableton Live user who wants more mixer, not more pads, the XL does the business.