

EKS XP5 £130

PC MAC



There are more digital DJ interfaces around than you can shake a pair of headphones at these days, but can EKS raise the bar with theirs?

> As digital DJing goes from strength to strength, control devices like the XP5 are becoming commonplace. The idea is to marry the convenience of digital with the tactile control of CD or vinyl mixing. Unlike many of the MIDI control interfaces, the XP5 offers a built-in audio interface, and two can be rigged up as a pair (like our test configuration), offering two controllable decks and two independent stereo interfaces with RCA connectors for routing to a hardware mixer.

First impressions are OK. We were expecting something slightly larger, having previously only seen the pictures. This isn't just some sort of masculine compensation at work, though – with DJ control surfaces, bigger is often better, as it gives finer control, particularly with jog-wheels that are intended for scratching.

As for the actual build quality, it's not fair to say that the XP5 feels cheap, but it certainly doesn't feel very expensive. The buttons just don't really have any travel, so it's hard to tell whether you've pushed one going on feel alone (though they do work well enough), and the pitch fader on one of our units was far too stiff, while the other didn't have a consistent action. In fact, the only real design positive was the layout, which is quite intuitive and well spaced, despite the size limitations.

The next major consideration is the installation, and that's pretty straightforward. The XP5 is designed to work with just about any DJing

software, and bundled with it is the option to download EKS's own Bison software (PC only) and the well-known Traktor 3 LE from Native Instruments. Bison is quite basic, so we'd suggest the latter, and what's more, there's currently an offer from UK EKS and NI dealers to upgrade to the full Traktor 3 for £70. Getting the unit to speak to Traktor 3 LE was as easy as selecting the relevant key-mapping file (see boxout) and choosing the unit as Traktor's audio interface.

Size matters

For what it is, the XP5 is alright, but you simply can't get fine enough scratch control from jog-wheels this small, so its main use will be for scrolling through tracks to cue up specific points. And with most software enabling you to jump straight to the right part of a waveform at the click of a button, you have to question the validity of such a feature. Combine this with the 'economical' construction and we're afraid that the XP5 is very much a home toy. The inclusion of an audio interface is a highlight, but still, this is one for the hobbyist, and even then you'd probably do well enough with DJing software and a generic MIDI controller, or, indeed, your QWERTY keyboard and mouse. **cm**

Contact Arbiter, 020 8207 7880
Web www.eks.fi
Info Price per pair, £250

System requirements

PC Windows 2000/XP/Vista,
USB 2.0 interface
Mac OS X 10.4, USB 2.0 interface

Test system

Mac Apple MacBook 2.2GHz,
OS X 10.5.2

Alternatively

Numark Total Control
cm119 >> 7/10 >> £180

A straight-up MIDI controller, but like the XP5, a bit on the small side and not of the best build quality

Behringer BCD3000
N/A >> N/A >> £172

Like the XP5, this contains an audio interface and comes with Traktor 3 LE, but is a dual-deck unit

Verdict

For
Nice layout
Audio interface built in
Easy to set up
Great software
Works well as a pair

Against
Unimpressive build quality
It's just too small!

If you want to have a go at DJing, the dinky XP5 could fit the bill, but it's not a viable option for the serious turntablist

5/10

Going visual

Our favourite feature of the XP5 is the accompanying driver software. This handy little app offers up a visual representation of the XP5 device, from which you can manually assign the MIDI signals transmitted by any given controller – this even includes the hold and release values for a key. EKS are rightly proud of this software, and it's certainly one of the best of its type we've come across.

This package also enables you to save any resulting profiles, so that you can have multiple key-mapping presets for different bits of software. Supplied are templates for Deckadance and Traktor (expect more in the future), and the system is tailor-made for swapping presets between users. All this is proof of EKS's commitment to making a truly cross-platform, multi-software device.