



Stanton

# FINALSCRATCH 2

**MusicTech**  
**RECOMMENDED**  
 ★★★★★★

**FOR PC  
& MAC**

Working as a DJ used to mean carrying boxes of precious vinyl from gig to gig – as well as your decks, mixer and other gear. James Summers lightens the load.

## KEY FEATURES

- New 24-bit/96kHz hardware with mic input, MIDI and more
- New hardware compatible with NI Traktor DJ Studio software
- Two virtual decks with zoomable waveforms
- Play audio files from time-coded vinyl or CD
- Fast search engine works with over 50,000 tracks
- High-quality Key Lock
- New, improved timecode readout with Absolute and Relative modes
- New mic recording with instant playback from vinyl
- New input recording for capturing your live mix direct to disk
- New Loop Playback feature makes adding loop samples to the mix easy

Manufacturer **Stanton**

Price **£629**

Contact **Lamba PLC 01582 690600**

Web **www.stantondj.com**

Minimum system requirements  
**PC Windows XP, Pentium III/Athlon 1GHz,  
 256MB RAM, spare FireWire port  
 Mac G4 500MHz, Mac OSX 10.3.5,  
 256MB RAM, spare FireWire port**

If you talk to any modern-day DJ, you may get the sense that there are changes afoot. Progression from vinyl to CD saw a dramatic decline in the use and sale of vinyl. It even saw many DJs such as Dave Clarke demanding to be sent only CDs from record distributors.

The last couple of years have seen a massive uptake of the MP3 format in the music market. Stanton, one of the leading DJ equipment manufacturers, got together with Native Instruments and developed the ingenious idea of using MP3 files for DJ performances. FinalScratch was born in 1999 from a unique and patented technology that enables real-time manipulation and scratching of digital music files such as MP3, .WAV, AIFF and audio CD files. Word soon spread of this new phenomenon around the DJ world, leaving many people bewildered as to how a DJ could play records, but never needed to change them. Out on the road, a DJ could now carry his entire system to a gig in a relatively small travel bag. One international DJ, Paul van Dyke, says that FinalScratch enables him to

transport some 500% more music than he could if he was physically carrying vinyl.

The kit consists of a ScratchAmp, which is the interface that enables code to be passed from specially designed vinyl to the computer. This can then be hooked up to a turntable or CD deck and a mixer. Some were impressed by the change in style, but vinyl junkies were left slightly worried and cynical.

## New and improved

The Plasa Show 2005 saw the launch of FinalScratch 2 – a new, improved version of 1.5. At a first glance, the new ScratchAmp looks a lot larger than the previous version and is far more appealing to the eye. The production of version 2 – compatible with both Windows PCs and Mac – is specifically aimed at the more advanced or professional DJ, with improved audio quality and huge improvements to latency and stability.

Our initial worry is that you are restricted to using only FinalScratch 2 for a performance, but the system does not require you to commit to using digital files only. Simply pop off the time-code records and put your standard vinyl on – no rewiring is necessary. The system can automatically tell that you've made the change and sends the output of the turntable to the mixer.

## Getting started

Setting up the hardware is relatively easy, with a well-illustrated manual explaining the correct procedure for

setting gain levels and the rumble threshold. This also comes with a good troubleshooting guide.

We tested FinalScratch 2 on an iMac G5 running Mac OSX 10.3.8 and with 768MB RAM, which exceeded the recommended system requirements. Registration is a simple, step-by-step process that involves sending an email to Native Instruments to authorise the product. Doing this is essential, as updates are regularly posted on the company's website to guarantee maximum stability and compatibility.

At first glance, the program's interface appears clear, well laid-out and less daunting than some other interfaces (such as AtomixMP3's and the DMC1 MixVibes'). Both of these are relatively cluttered and incorporate some arguably unnecessary functions, alongside hardware that is quite unlike standard DJ equipment. It is in this area that Stanton has made a wise decision: keeping the hardware as close to a DJ's traditional turntables and mixer as possible.

Calibration is required every time you use FinalScratch 2 and we experienced problems with the ScratchAmp not initialising. We asked Stanton's engineers about it and received the following reply: "The need to switch sample rates for initialising the ScratchAmp is a known issue that is also mentioned in the Readme file. It is OS/hardware related and we believe that Mac OSX Tiger will improve this situation. But once you know how to force-initialise the Amp, the problem is manageable."



Apart from this problem, calibration is straightforward. The process takes only a few seconds and is achieved by placing the needle onto the spinning, coded vinyl. We were pleasantly surprised by just how quick and easy it is to get up and running. Having such a 'ready-to-go' piece of kit made the whole learning process much less stressful. A number of default music and loop files come as part of the package; again, these are very helpful in that they enable you to start using FinalScratch with the minimum of fuss.

In the accompanying Traktor FS software, your music files are stored in a number of well-organised folders and

you factor in longevity: vinyl – particularly when it's being punished by a hard-working DJ – simply won't survive for more than a few gigs. Digital MP3s, however, can be played and replayed almost infinitely.

Each deck displays two clear waveforms, giving you a good indication of breaks and build-ups in the music. When your track is coming to the end, the waveform flashes.

### DJs and pirates

Imagine this: you have just finished mastering your new track in a studio. You import your finished .WAV file and add it to your collection. You do not have to worry about burning it to CD

## FOR THE PROGRESSIVE DJ WITH A LARGE RECORD COLLECTION, FS2 IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD.

sub-folders that can be sorted by genre. The Track Collection folder is the overall master folder and contains the Playlists folder, which is where you pre-plan your sets.

Playing a track is simple: just drag a track out of your Track Collection folder and drop it onto either turntable A or B. The sheer response of the equipment is remarkable and while the quality of MP3s has some people wary of moving into this world, we honestly couldn't say we would have known we were listening to an MP3. This quality issue becomes less important when

or spending a large amount of money on a dub plate. Take your laptop to the gig and you'll have all the tracks you need at your fingertips. It does, however, raise another issue: for many people, the term MP3 means illegal music, so FinalScratch represents a perfect opportunity for the DJ community to demonstrate how badly piracy is affecting the music industry. It's also a great way for producer DJs to exchange tracks, saving considerable amounts of money on test pressings or CD production. FinalScratch 2 could even be seen as

## Measuring Up

FinalScratch 2 seem to be the first words uttered by a DJ if you mention MP3 DJing and version 1.5 is still available. This is now aimed more towards the beginner, priced at £430, but there are other alternatives on the market.

MixVibes has released a program that requires no further hardware other than two pieces of vinyl. MixVibes also supports many kinds of sound configurations: PCI, integrated motherboard, USB or FireWire soundcards (you need a stereo line input to connect a turntable). MixVibes supports ASIO soundcards and the Hercules DJ Console. The latency will depend on your soundcard and system configuration. This currently seems to be the only product that competes with FinalScratch 2. MixVibes has no hardware, which can limit functions such as recording audio, for example. There is also a massive price difference, as MixVibes is £99. MixVibes is an excellent package for beginners, but FinalScratch 2 would be in our shopping basket.

an environmentally friendly piece of kit, saving on the production of CD and record covers.

### Setting the standard

Importing files is quick and easy using the Explorer from the Folders menu. iTunes works incredibly well with FinalScratch 2 – it's as simple as creating a new folder and importing the contents of your iTunes' folder. Once they're imported, track details such as title, artist, BPM, bit rate and so on can be edited in the List window. This is a nicely implemented function and enables you to keep your music strictly organised.

Recording in audio through the mic and aux inputs makes for a new way of creating a cappella battle weapons. FinalScratch handled this task easily, with no conceivable latency. There is a scratch vinyl available from Stanton, which is slightly slimmer than a standard record, making it easier to get to grips with. With the ever-growing popularity of the digital music market, FinalScratch 2 has set new standards in DJ'ing, marrying traditional hardware with the best of new technology and working practices. Look out for it in a club near you. **MTM**

### METHOD SPOT

The scratch vinyl is coded in one-minute segments that can be assigned to loops in the Loop Pool. This can be ten or 15 segments, depending on which piece of vinyl you use. As each segment is played on the record it loads each individual loop. Pressing the Pool button can activate this. This will automatically load your first 15 loops in the Pool. A Skipless mode is available which enables you to play loops that are longer than one minute. Loading the next loop is achieved by lifting the needle to a new segment of the record. This is an excellent function for turntablists who want to create a battle set consisting of many different samples and loops.



## SUMMARY

### WHY BUY

- Very stable
- Reduced latency
- Input recording function
- Loop Pool function
- FireWire connectivity
- MIDI function for hot keys

### WALK ON BY

- Calibration issues

## VERDICT

For the progressive DJ with a large record collection and a small van, FS2 is the only way forward. Highly recommended.

