



AKAI MPD32

Take two boxes into the studio? AKAI thinks not with its new MPD32 pad and control surface. Hollin Jones is on the beat.

KEY FEATURES

- MIDI sync'ed note repeat with MPC swing
- 16 full-size, velocity- and pressure-sensitive pads
- Assignable switches, sliders and knobs
- 2 assignable footswitch inputs
- Assignable pedal controller input
- LCD display
- 30 user-definable presets for various DAW and software applications

MEASURING UP

The M-Audio Trigger Finger (£169) is USB-powered and also has 16 pads, eight knobs and four faders, with templates for programs including Reason. You also get Live Lite. For those who prefer beat-making to knobs and faders, the Alesis Control Pad (£139) is also USB-powered and acts more like a drum machine with large pads.

MPD32

Manufacturer **AKAI**

Price **£220**

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The more advanced music software becomes, the greater people's desire for more hands-on control over it. That's the idea behind the latest MIDI control surface from AKAI, the MPD32. Bigger brother to the MPD24, it is solidly built and sits comfortably next to your mixer or computer keyboard. Around the back are DC in, a USB port both for power and MIDI, MIDI I/O ports, two footswitch and an expression pedal input, plus a Kensington lock port for securing it.

In control

The front panel is where you do most of your controlling from, and it's logically laid out, with a bright LCD screen displaying all the important parameters. The panel is dominated by the 16 large MPC pads, which by default transmit note information. Although they can also be set to send program change messages, they're most useful for playing beats or instrument notes in the classic MPC style, and have velocity and pressure sensitivity for more expressive playing.

Above these are eight faders, and to the right are eight assignable controller knobs. Along with the expression pedal,

these two can transmit control change or aftertouch information. There are also eight buttons that can send control change or program change information. The knobs, faders and buttons are all assignable, so you can create new templates with specific controller

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assignments. A system of pads and banks enables you to extend the functionality of the controls and there are a total of 75 available controllers.

The MPD32 has four modes, all of which are fairly self-explanatory. Preset mode enables you to load, save and copy presets; Edit mode enables you to change the way the controllers behave; Global mode enables you to set global preferences for the unit; and Program Change mode enables you to switch programs on your remote DAW or MIDI hardware. Some reference to the manual is sometimes necessary, but once you have found your way around, it's easy enough to change settings.

Hot plates

A programmable MIDI control surface is all well and good, but it makes life easier if it comes with templates for the kinds of leading products it's likely to be used with – thankfully, this one does. The CD

contains preset files for various DAWs, while support for some others is automatic. A glance at the manual reveals support for 18 programs, including Live Lite, Reason, Cubase, FL Studio, Sonar, Stylus RMX and a host of soft synths such as those from Arturia, GMedia, Rob Papen and more.

You put the MPD32 into the relevant software control mode by selecting its preset on the unit. We tested it with a few in the list and it worked well, especially with Reason 4, which is particularly adept at auto-mapping controllers with ReMote.

The ability to play notes and beats with the pads as well as controlling other parameters with the faders and knobs is very useful, and with the buttons you can navigate around the sequencer. The level of control will vary slightly depending on your DAW or synth, but the Presets PDF provides an exhaustive list of exactly what is mapped where for each program. You can, of course, tweak existing presets or create and store your own from scratch.

Dual fuel

The MPD32 combines MPC pad-style composition and beat-making tools with a more conventional MIDI control surface, backed up by templates to take

some of the pain out of setting up software control. It fulfils both of these roles well, being fun to play yet capable as a control surface. Whether you're a beat-maker or just want more hands-on control over your software, the MPD32 is a strong contender. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Pressure-sensitive pads
- USB power and MIDI
- Good selection of DAW templates
- Comprehensive control features
- Includes BFD Lite

WALK ON BY

- No external PSU as standard

VERDICT

A great dual solution for beat-programming and DAW control at a competitive price.

