



Novation Launchpad X

£179



Novation's Live controller is back on the block with a new name, some new tricks and a fresh new look for 2020

> Launched back in 2009, Novation's original Launchpad helped set the standard for today's grid-based MIDI controllers. It can therefore take a chunk of the credit - at the very least - for introducing a totally new way of programming and composing music with technology. Along with Akai's APC40, Launchpad then paved the way for a flood of similar clip controllers and launchers, such as Ableton's Push, Livid's Base and Akai's Force. However, things in this controller market have clearly moved on a lot since then, so how does the new Launchpad X measure up to the current crop of competitors?

The range

The Launchpad X sits in the middle of the current Novation Launchpad range, flanked by the already-established, pricier and more feature-rich Launchpad Pro, and the smaller, more basic Launchpad Mini, itself launched

alongside the X as a cheaper alternative. The big news with this model is that the X features full-colour RGB pads, which are both velocity and pressure sensitive and exhibit true polyphonic aftertouch, which was inherited from the Pro. The unit can now also be configured to function as a fully-customisable MIDI controller capable of storing and recalling four different controller

"The Launchpad can take some credit for introducing a new way of programming and composing music"

layouts across the pads, so has a couple of ace cards up its colourful sleeves.

Nice pad(s)

At a mere 18mm high, the Launchpad X's profile is satisfyingly slim and the build quality reassuringly solid - it seems like the unit should easily be able to stand up to the punishment of prolonged, enthusiastic finger drumming.

The 8 x 8 grid of 64 brightly-lit pads - which dominates Launchpad X's surface - is unsurprisingly designed for viewing and controlling Ableton Live's Session View, with each pad's colour matched to the corresponding onscreen clip. Pads aside, the buttons that flank the top and the right hand side have a satisfyingly squishy resilience.

One of the major differences between the X and the Launchpad Pro is that the former lacks the Pro's extra row of buttons down the left and across the bottom of the grid. It also has no

"If you are not an Ableton user and wondering whether to buy it, then this could be the deal breaker"

hardware MIDI connectors like those found on the Launchpad Pro and the Launchkey Mini Mk3, relying on a single USB-C connection for both power and MIDI.

Button up

Even though it might lack some of the controls of its larger sibling, the Launchpad X is still suitably festooned with buttons. Across the top of the unit, the first four buttons are used for navigating around Live's Session view. As you do this, so the range of triggerable clips moves around the display according to your movements, with the pad illumination shifting to match. The area of clips currently visible on the Launchpad's grid is shown on screen by a coloured border, so it's easy enough to tell which pad corresponds to which onscreen clip. After this, you get three mode buttons - Session, Note and Custom - and a dedicated button for Live 10's Session Record and handy new Capture MIDI function, which effectively records whatever you last played as a MIDI clip, even if you weren't in Record mode at the time.

The eight buttons arranged down the right side of the grid are Scene launch buttons by default, but double up as selectors for the different modes the pads can fulfil in Mixer mode. The first four of these transform the rows and columns on the grid into virtual volume, pan and send A and B controls. Meanwhile, the last four buttons turn the bottom row of pads into stop, mute, solo or record-arm toggle switches, controlling each vertical track above them. There isn't a global play/stop button though - as featured on the Launchkey Mini Mk3 - which we found a little odd on a device that is so geared towards live performance.

Mode diggity

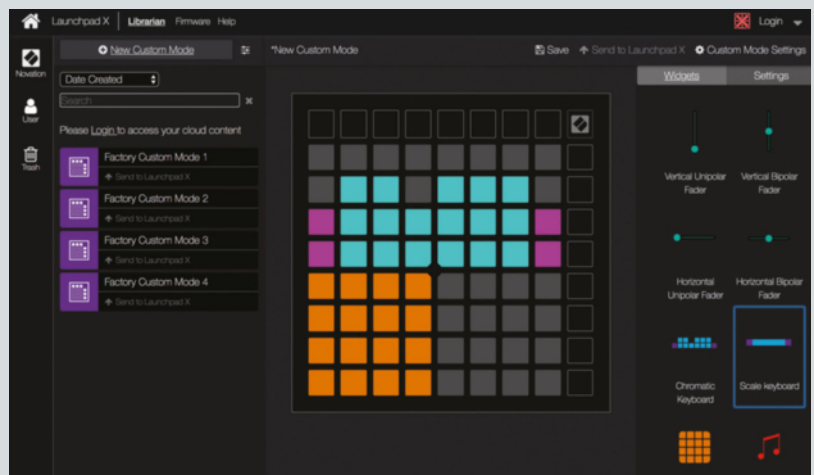
In Session mode, the pads function as clip launch buttons - just hit a pad to launch the corresponding audio or MIDI clip, and then hit an unlit pad on the same track to stop it. In Mixer mode, the rows of pads turn into virtual faders or pan pots for control of onscreen tracks while mixing. Faders are velocity-responsive - hitting a pad hard moves a fader quickly, while tapping it softly will change the value more gradually.

Select Note mode and the Launchpad intelligently senses what type of track is currently active and deploys the pads accordingly. If you have a drum track enabled,

four panels of 4 x 4 drum pads corresponding to the currently-loaded drum rack will be displayed. If it's an instrument track, the whole grid is laid out according to the currently selected scale. Select a scale by holding down the Note button and choosing your required scale pattern from a selection that includes 16 of the usual suspects (major, minor etc).

Overall, drum and instrument playability has been improved exponentially by the Launchpad X's velocity-sensitive pads. The Capture MIDI button is a welcome nod to spontaneity, the added MIDI controller functionality a huge bonus, and the various Scale modes nothing short of inspiring. It may not turbo-charge your workflow in quite the same way as the Push 2 does, but for the money the Launchpad X certainly represents a worthwhile addition to anyone's Ableton armoury. **cm**

Web novationmusic.com



You can control any DAW or soft synth using custom layouts

You configure it out

Accessed via the Custom button, Launchpad X can store four custom layouts of MIDI controller messages across the pads, for control of any DAW or softsynth outside of the Ableton universe. This means you can use the pads to transmit notes and drum events, set them up as program change buttons, or configure them as virtual faders of the kind found in Mixer mode. Selected by the upper four buttons on the right hand side, layouts one and two are conventional drum and keyboard pad layouts by default, while three and four are empty, ready to be set up by the user.

You can edit the factory layouts or create your own using Novation's free Components app, a visually intuitive editor that's easy to use and makes assigning controllers to the pads a breeze. Just drag prefabricated widgets - a bipolar fader column, for example, or a single-octave chromatic keyboard note layout - onto the grid area and select which of the four layouts you want to apply it to before transmitting it to the device. So if you were wondering whether there was any reason to buy a Launchpad X if you're not an Ableton user, this alone could be the dealbreaker.

Alternatively

Novation Launchpad Mini Mk3
£100

Smaller footprint, fewer features and non velocity-sensitive pads, but a more affordable Launchpad

Novation Launchpad Pro
cm222 » 9/10 » £229

This adds more dedicated buttons and a hardware MIDI In/Out, but could also now be due a refresh

Verdict

For Great-feeling velocity/pressure-sensitive RGB pads
Easy setup and Components editor
Four custom MIDI controller layouts
Handy 'Capture MIDI' Button
Generous software bundle

Against No hardware MIDI In/Out
No global play/stop buttons

An expressive way to bring Live's Session view to your fingertips in full RGB colour



The X sits in the middle of the range in terms of features, size and price, and lacks the Pro's MIDI connectors

9/10