Korg MicroKontrol 37-keys USB Controller Keyboard Review

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The microKontrol, from Korg, is one of a new breed of control keyboards designed for mobile electronic musicians. It combines many of the most commonly used controls from a variety of studio devices, including panners, faders, keyboard and pads, into a portable device. The flexibility of the microKontrol makes it a great controller to consider if you are interested in laptop music.

The microKontrol is styled after Korg’s popular microKorg synthesizer. Unlike the microKorg, though, this keyboard isn’t a standalong synthesizer. This is a USB controller designed to be used as a control keyboard.

For general use, the microKontrol keyboard is one of the best USB control keyboards available. It provides a large number of controllers, and provides every controller type that you need for most electronic music creation. It has a 3-octave keyboard (37-note mini keyboard), 8 encoders, 8 sliders, and 16 trigger pads that you can use to control your favorite soft synths, DAW (Digital Audio Workstation), or other musical tools such as external MIDI sound modules. Korg packs the microKontrol with knobs, sliders and pads, yet it is layed out in a very straightforward manner.

The Controls

The first thing that you may notice about the microKontrol is the keyboard. The keyboard is a mini keyboard, which means that it’s probably not the first choice for pianists. It’s important to note, however, that this isn’t designed for playing Chopin on, it’s designed for controlling an virtual instruments and electronic music studios. For entering in basslines, playing pads, or playing a lead, it does the job. It doesn’t take too long to get used to, and you can play tricky two octave leaps without any problem. The keyboard is velocity sensitive, and it has Octave Shift and Transpose keys, so you can play in any octave.

In addition to the keyboard, the microKontrol has eight rotary encoders and eight sliders, 16 pads, a joystick, and you can hook in pedals. This gives you 35 controllers. The 8 encoders and sliders can be assigned to transmit any MIDI control change (including NRPN and RPN messages) to control volume, panning, or anything else. Each encoder and slider also has an LCD that indicates the parameter and the transmitted value, with the backlight color changing between orange and green to distinguish between the encoder and slider. The LCD’s are very useful, because you don’t have to look at the computer to check what you’re controlling.

The microKONTROL provides 16 trigger pads that can be assigned to just about anything you like. The pads can be used to trigger notes with full velocity transmission, or assigned to transmit MIDI control changes to operate the transport of your recording software or act as any type of switch. This means they can be used like an MPC. You can use them to trigger 16 samples, or to control loops in a sequencer, or even just to enter drum sounds.

It’s easy to re-assign controllers to any MIDI signal, and you can save these and call them back instantly.

Connections

The microKONTROL provides MIDI IN/OUT ports, and can also be used as a USB-MIDI interface. You can use MIDI clock data to control the tempo, or transmit MIDI messages directly. The microKONTROL can also be powered via its USB connection, making the AC power supply adaptor or even batteries unnecessary when connected to a computer via USB.

Specs:

Supported operating systems: Mac OS X, Windows XP

Technical Description

Controllers:
Keyboard: 37 Keys (mini-keyboard, transmits velocity)
4-way Joystick (with switch)
16 Pads (can transmit velocity or fixed value)
8 Rotary Encoders

8 Sliders
Value Dial

Display:
Main Display: 8 characters (8×5 dot) with 3 segment backlit LCD
Sub Display: 8 characters (8×5 dot) with 3 segment backlit LCD
Tempo LED
Memory: 12 User (RAM) locations

Connectors:
DC 9 V (AC adapter)
MIDI IN, OUT, THRU
USB connector
Expression Pedal

Power Supply: DC 9 V (AC adapter) or 6 AA batteries
Power Consumption: AC adapter: 3.5W (Max)

Dimensions:
20.63 in. (W) x 9.13 in. (D) x 2.76 in. (H)
524(W) x 232(D) x 70(H)mm
Weight: 2.6kg/5.73 lbs.

Accessories:
AC adapter (DC 9 V, 600mA), USB Cable, CD-ROM: microKONTROL Librarian Software, Template Sheet, Driver,
Name Sheet, Seal for Trigger Pad

Options:
DS-1H Damper Pedal
PS-1 Pedal Switch

System Compatibility:
Macintosh: Supported OS: Mac OS X v10.2 or later
Supported Computer: Apple Macintosh with Mac OS X and USB port

Windows:
Supported OS: Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition/Professional
Supported Computer: PC with Windows XP and USB port (recommended Intel USB chipset)