

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS TRAKTOR SCRATCH

Price: £450 (or £300 for crossgrade from Final Scratch or Serato Scratch Live)

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Native Instruments Traktor Scratch

Formerly partnered up with Stanton for Final Scratch, Native Instruments step up with their own solo offering. PAUL MORRISSEY says all this scratching is making him itch...

The digital age never stops expanding as more and more DJ manufacturers want to grab themselves a slice of the pie. After working with Stanton on Final Scratch for a number of years, Native Instruments finally release their own software/hardware package. So does it come up to scratch?

Traktor Scratch is based on the well-known Traktor 3 software that has been available for a few years now. The software has now been updated and bundled with its own audio interface (scratch amp), CDs and vinyl.

Native Instruments' package certainly looks the business: on opening the box first impressions are quality. The Audio 8 interface is an all-metal affair. This interface is at the heart of the package, and its connectivity is nothing short of impressive with MIDI in and out, USB port, a chunky ground post for your turntables, four stereo inputs and outputs plus a mic input and a dedicated headphone output. The illuminated control panel on the top of the Audio 8 clearly displays what is connected and configured so there's no rummaging in the dark to see if cables are connected correctly. The Input Mode toggles through the input options and the Activity LEDs even flash if the wrong device is plugged in for the selected format. Clearly a lot of thought has gone into this product.

For those of you who haven't seen Traktor software before, it allows you to cue, beatmatch, scratch and mix your digital audio files as well as organise them into a database for easy access. Traktor Scratch's onscreen set up gives you two deck displays with track details, pitch control, interface select with a large and clear waveform display which has a convenient +/- key so you instantly increase or decrease the size of the waveform display. During playback this waveform changes colour to give you a 60-second warning that the playing track is about to end, which is a nice touch.

The Effects controls are situated above the waveforms and more importantly there is a centrally mounted Scratch Panel displaying sticker calibration markers for the more scratch-oriented DJs, which in turn are calibrated by your choice of time-coded CD or vinyl. All this can be changed on the fly. During calibration the wear and tear of the vinyls or pickup (cart stylus) is taken into account and the status is displayed - it will even tell you if you have lost a channel.

Adding seamless loops to the mix is easy. You can even move the entire loop while the track is playing. Loop default is set to four, this means your track will loop four beats. Changes to the sample length can be easily made on the fly by clicking the drop down menu: click on the loop length and it takes care of itself, staying perfectly in time.

The multi effects section is very creative but easy to use, boasting delay, reverb, flanger, beat masher, filters and LFO. All have an analogue feel to their use. Multiple routing with individual screen displays can all be done on the fly as well as adjustment of all FX parameters.

The Audio Recorder feature lets you record your set in real time as you play, it even allows you to record external sources as you play - for instance a vocalist or percussion player. Record levels can be adjusted and the Cut & Continue feature allows you to separate the recording into individual .WAV files - not bad!

You can control Traktor Scratch with both MIDI and Hotkeys. Hotkeys allows you to assign letters on your keyboard to operate functions of the software in one hit, rather than having to access drop down menus etc. You can also use any of the 16 MIDI channels available so external MIDI devices can control Traktor's functionality. The manual is very in-depth and will guide you through the set up, step-by-step.

COMPLETE CONTROL

The control latency, the rate your computer converts the audio to data and back again of Traktor Scratch is very low, which is good news. The optimization of the software and Audio 8 is excellent, and you'll notice this most when you're scratching or back spinning using the control vinyls or CDs. The software and computer are processing the data yet your hands-on control really feels in real time.

Whether you're at home or at a gig, Track Browser is an invaluable tool. You can manage and sort your songs giving you the easiest and quickest access to your songs allowing set up of playlists and favourites. No more searching and scrambling to find tracks, just browse and pre select tunes by BPM, artist, genre or label for instant access at the gig. And all this info is shown in the bottom third of the screen so you always have a visual on what track you are going to play next.

Last but not least, connectivity. How many times do you buy a piece of kit, then you find out you need to spend much! money on interconnect cables? Not with Traktor Scratch! A complete set of multicore cables is supplied of I have to say, impressive quality, so you can change digital solutions without interrupting a DJ performance. This is quality.

The Traktor Scratch package with its excellent Audio 8 interface gives unrivalled hands on control of your audio files. This is a pro-level product and I don't say that lightly, but you can make this package as complicated or as simple to use as you desire with the settings available. The more you use it, the more you begin to appreciate the complexity of its functions, which in turn allows you to take your digital experimentation to another level. iDJ

FEATURES

- Audio interface with robust aluminum case
- Eight hi-gain outputs, eight inputs, two optional phono preamps, mic input
- 20 individual status LEDs for full visual control
- Two control records
- Two control CDs
- Two pro multicore cables
- Two playback decks with filter effects and high-quality key correction
- Two dedicated effects output channels
- Track management with quick search, virtual record crates and iTunes integration
- Integrated Beatport online store
- XP, OS X and Universal Binary compatible
- 24bit /96kHz low-latency
- MIDI I/O
- USB 2.0 bus powered

VERDICT

Excellent quality and superb performance - a winner



ALTERNATIVES

Similar systems include SERATQ SCRATCH LIVE, M-AUDIO TORQ CONECTIV and STANTON FINAL SCRATCH.