



## AT A GLANCE

**Price:**

Around £269 each

**product type:**

Portable mp3 controller and audio card

**Rating:**

Bedroom – Installation

**Web:**

www.eks.fi

**Contact:**

EKS – 00358 9503 1188

**what you get**

The final package contains the unit, RCA and USB cables and a CD-Rom. The CD-Rom contains the installation package and a user manual. The software and updates are always free of charge on the EKS website.

**what you need**

Windows PC (Laptop or Desktop)  
700 MHz or above processor  
256MB memory  
Windows 2000/XP

## EKS – XP10 Portable mp3 Controller

Will we ever stop talking about mp3 DJ gear? Not while manufacturers keep making exciting new products. Finnish company EKS launch into public view with the most convenient and advanced hardware controlled solution for PC-based mp3 DJing we have ever seen. **Words: David Eserin**

>> Today's digital DJ can choose from a huge variety of products, many tailored to their specific needs. However, cost always remains a priority along with intuitive and easy use. The XP10 covers all bases.

**Jog dial**

The EKS XP10 has a sweet vinyl emulation system, using a four-and-a-half inch touch sensitive jog wheel to enable scratching, backspins and vinyl-style cueing for locating start points. The jog dial spins to a stop after two or three turns, depending on how much welly you give it. It has a good sturdy feel, but could do with a little more weight to make the slow-down acceleration more fluid.

The top of the dial is metal and works by conductivity, similar to the American Audio Pro Scratch 2. Simply make any contact with your

hand on the surface and the track stops and goes into scratch mode. This is by far the most accurate method of touch sensitivity, even over the Pioneer CDJ-1000.

The XP10 jog dial is nowhere near the size of these comparisons, but enables accurate scratching and easy cueing. To bend the pitch without stopping the track, the outer edge is made of non conductive material. Scratch mode can be turned off allowing the conductive plates to be touched without stopping play back. The pitch bend has a respectable affect and you don't need to spin it off its hinges to get a result.

It would be more beneficial if each turn of the wheel in scratch mode covered more ground, but it's still quite easy to locate the desired section of the track. Alternatively, the two left and right

arrow buttons skip forward or backward in steps of 15 seconds, which can also be customised to different time increments.

**Built In Audio**

The XP10 has a high quality built-in sound card. With a signal-to-noise ratio of 105dB or more, the XP10 beats normal high-quality sound cards hands down.

Although there are plenty of multi channel audio cards on the market, none of them offer what a travelling digital DJ really wants. Which is two stereo outputs for mixing and perhaps an input for recording. There is no simple solution with a break out box purely for two stereo phono connectors.

The XP10 comes closest to providing a complete solution for digital DJs. The controller requires no external power, which makes a digital DJ's life



easier with minimal setup. Just plug the USB cable from the controller to a laptop and plug the phono cables from the back of the controller to the mixer and launch the program. The controller's audio interface is also available as an individual output on top of the onboard audio card in Windows.

Unfortunately there are no ASIO drivers for use with other software and not all software can tell more than one of these controllers apart. But with all this updated malarkey, we can hope for extended support in the future for other audio programs.

### Sounds Good

The audio interface is an important factor to consider, but equally so is the source, especially with technology as complicated as an mp3 file. Due to the very nature of an mp3 file, being compressed audio, when the playback speed is slowed down so is sample rate and quality.

CD players and mp3 decoders (XP10 software) have corrective circuitry for any tiny errors that can occur on CDs and mp3 files. This technology can also be designed to make the scratching sound more realistic. Scratching a digital file produces a completely different sound to scratching wax.

### Installation

Somebody pinch me! Both the hardware and software installation couldn't be any easier. After installing the tiny set-up program, DJmag loaded the software and plugged in the controller. There were

no drivers to install, no rebooting, nothing. DJmag loaded a tune using nothing but the controller and were instantly able to play and control it like vinyl.

Up to four controllers can be connected to one laptop, which explains the layout of the software. A new window is launched for each controller and once it is established which controller refers to which window, they can be arranged on screen.

Each unit can be disconnected and changed on the fly without causing problems to the computer or other units. Think of the XP10 as a tabletop CD player-like device where the USB cable is the power cord and the audio connects to a mixer, similar to a CD player.

### Cue and Looping

Cue, loop and track information is stored automatically for each track. The looping is seamless and has the best on the fly start and stop controls DJmag has tried on an mp3 controller. It's possible to get amazing loops and modify them instantly.

Loop in and out adjust is accessible at the press of a button next to the jog dial, which controls the time. Press the in or out again and the wheel goes back into scratch mode. Additionally, there is an instant reverse button which is really responsive. DJmag managed to do the reverse trick while keeping the beat, and then even some off beats on first try with no trouble.

### Record Box

The XP10 has a music library for searching the hard drive easily, launched by the eject button on the controller. Once the window is opened, the jog dial scrolls through the tracks and the directional keys on the controller help you move around menus and files. The music library has different sorting options such as track name, artist and genre.



### Structurally Sound?

The pitch slider feels a tad loose, which raises a small dispute. Crossfaders should be smooth, volume faders slightly stiffer and pitch faders should be the stiffest. Making tiny adjustments to the pitch is easy enough, but be careful not to knock it even slightly as the pitch slider does stick out quite far. Considering the XP10 weighs well under 400 grams each, the unit sticks well to most surfaces even when given a damn thrashing on the scratch front. The new engine is rock solid.

### Software

XP10's software can be downloaded free of charge from the company website. Software is not restricted in any way and can be tested and used even without the XP10 hardware, though to get the most out of it the XP10 Audio Pad is needed. Customise the windows to display a massive amount of information at once, especially useful when trawling through hundreds, or even thousands, of mp3s. The wave display shows the track's waveform on the screen for faster cueing. And all operations including pitch range, play mode and looping are available on the controller.

### Pitch Control

The pitch range can be changed from 8, 16 and 32% with accuracy down to a resolution of 0.0015%. To show such accuracy in the display would look confusing, but it's nice to know.

### Conclusion

This is the best experience we've had with a computer-based mp3 controller. The XP10 offers amazing value and simplicity with outstanding touch sensitive control and audio card built in. It is the first true plug and play DJ solution with such advanced features. This is not vinyl emulation, it's a step above. The only thing missing is a big bunch of effects and filter section. But this is a sturdy and reliable product that will convert any technophobe into submission. Obviously a laptop is needed, but buying a laptop opens up more possibilities than you could wave a stick at.

## SPECS >>

Frequency Response: 4 Hz - 24 kHz  
 Signal-to-Noise Ratio: 105 dB (EIA)  
 Total Harmonic Distortion: 0.002% (EIA)  
 Audio Output: 10 V (peak-to-peak) 3.5 V (RMS)  
 Power Requirements: None (USB power)  
 Power Consumption: 100mA  
 Dimensions (W x D x H): 140mm x 210mm x 25mm  
 Weight: 370 g

### controls

22 low-travel buttons  
 4.5" touch sensitive wheel  
 100mm pitch slider

### connectors

USB (connecting to PC)  
 RCA audio outputs (stereo)

### replacement parts

Pitch slider

### similar products

Stanton Final Scratch, £500  
[www.finalscratch.com](http://www.finalscratch.com)  
 PCDJ DAC-2, £300  
[www.emmissionuk.com](http://www.emmissionuk.com)  
 Soundgraph D-Vinyl 2020, £750  
[www.soundgraph.com](http://www.soundgraph.com)

### good points

Complete system  
 High quality audio interface  
 Lightweight controller  
 Touch sensitive wheel with scratch  
 Plug and play

### bad points

Loose pitch slider

### value for money

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### build quality

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### usability

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### sounds quality

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### overall

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