

AN ABSOLUTE TOUCH!

Stanton's new touch-surface DJ controller lets virtual DJs get busy with their fingers

A touch-sensitive unit in the vein of the Korg Kaoss Pad, Stanton's DaScratch Midi controller takes a totally fresh approach to controlling DJ software. Forget about physical controls like knobs, dials, sliders and a jog-wheel. Instead, DaScratch has replaced all these with a flat touch-sensitive surface that is mapped out with LEDs. These LEDs can switch in form and function at the hit of a button too.

DaScratch can be used as a deck to scratch up digital music files, but switch modes and the same surface can then control your digital mixing.

Also known as the SCS.3d, DaScratch makes a good impression from the moment it is unpacked. Slim, elegantly designed, lightweight and entirely plastic, the SCS.3d is also seriously portable — about the same size as an average paperback.

With the unit held firmly in place by large rubber feet, users will find a detachable underside plate that stores the USB cable during transportation — this needs to be removed by the two twist-locks to access the USB port. The idea is to plug the USB cable in, then feed it out through one of the plate's many cable holes before locking the two halves back together. This ensures that the cable won't get accidentally yanked out mid set.

Other Stanton units can be linked and locked to the SCS.3d thanks to a magnetic strip on the side.

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DAROUTER

The set-up package for Mac and PC users consists of one application called 'DaRouter'. Installing the DaRouter package serves three crucial purposes. First up, it handles the USB driver and allows DaScratch to be identified by your system. Secondly, it installs the presets for Traktor and Serato and, finally, it adds the DaRouter utility program.

DaRouter acts like a bridge between the hardware and software, making DaScratch that much smoother to use. It also needs to be running when using the preconfigured presets for Traktor and Serato, although it isn't essential when using the SCS.3d as a controller for other software such as Ableton Live.

In DaRouter, the control mode and preset need to be set, which in this case is our single SCS.3d unit and Traktor. Moving on to Traktor itself, the Midi settings template needs to be loaded for the SCS.3d. This was installed onto the computer along with Da Router in its program folder. The final trick is to select the right Midi interface, which is not SCS.3d but DaRouter.

words: **MARC 01**



This might all seem a little bit complicated but it can all be saved as a default set-up so the process does not need to be repeated.

INTUITIVE

Indeed, one of the big selling points for DaScratch is that it should work pretty much straight out of the box — it's intuitive. We decided to get straight into the mix without consulting the manual to see just how intuitive it really is. Starting off in vinyl mode, we can use the circular touchpad in two ways to scrub and scratch a track. The central area works in an up and down motion and provides a one-finger scratching experience. The finite area means that you can only scratch a small part of a track at one time but things can easily be spun forward and backwards. Two fingers can also be used to shuttle. This invites the user to experiment with new scratch techniques unique to DaScratch. In terms of tactile use, tracks behave just like vinyl. If the finger is spun forward and backward on release, it will decelerate smoothly to playback speed without stopping. The second vinyl technique is more for scrubbing, rewind, etc, but can also be used for quick scratching. It uses the circumference area around the centre, just like winding a record round. Be careful not to slip into the central scratch area when doing this, as it will disengage the scrub mode and stop moving. The best way is to keep contact with the outer edge of the circle during these movements. As the DJ scratches and scrubs, the SCS.3d supplies a cute little light show of illuminating LEDs to accompany your moves.

The user can also control two virtual decks using one SCS.3d by pressing the deck button with the colour changing from blue to red to confirm the swap.

DaScratch has four other dedicated control modes — FX, EQ, loop and trigger. These change the way in which the central touch area is divided up and also how it reacts to the touch. For instance, in EQ mode, the central area is divided into three strips for bass, mid and treble gain/reduction, while the four buttons around the edge become kill switches. In loop mode, it allocates the central area for activating the loop points whilst dividing the outer ring into four quadrants for adjusting the size of the loop. Some controls are always available regardless of the mode. These include the transport controls at the bottom of the unit and the channel gain/pitch slider at the top.

PERFECT MATCH

The LED indicators are especially useful when using the gain/pitch sliders as they provide a readout that matches the real levels in Traktor. This is true even when switching between the virtual decks. The pitch slider has been programmed to provide a high degree of precision compared to a regular Midi knob or dial. This is because it sends the data incrementally and takes around three full slides to go from central position to max on the virtual deck. DaScratch is a lot of fun to use and works pretty flawlessly. But there are a few limitations to the control mode preset. Users can only control the three-band EQs properly and not the Xone emulation. Yet overall it's a real winner with Traktor and is the next best thing to using vinyl. It can also be used with Serato Scratch Live for almost everything except scratching. Some of the main advantages are being able to scroll through the crates and prepare playlists, load up the decks and doubles in the mix. Trigger and cue points can also be set for loops and any other functions that can be Midi controlled. For all other software, it can be used just like any other controller that sends Midi CC and Note On messages. It's not necessary to use DaRouter for this, so just select STS.3d in the Midi controller preferences and use Midi learn to get yourself connected



TECH SPEC

- ◆ Presets for Traktor Studio 3.4 and Serato supplied
- ◆ Transport controls for play, cue, sync and tap
- ◆ Sliders for gain and pitch
- ◆ Four touch-sensitive trigger buttons
- ◆ Touch-sensitive area provides linear and rotary controls as well as trigger points
- ◆ Nine backlit touch-sensitive buttons (switched via preset)
- ◆ Windows XP or Vista/Mac G5 or Intel Mac OSX (v10.4 or later)
- ◆ Size: 216.5 x 120 x 35.25mm
- ◆ Weight: 1.2Kg

PRICE
£299

CONTACT
enterthesystem.com

VERDICT

BUILD QUALITY	4.0
EASE OF USE	5.0
FEATURES	4.5
VALUE FOR MONEY	4.0
SOUND QUALITY	n/a

HYPE
Get hands-on control of Traktor and other DJ software with touch-surface precision.

GRIPE
The only thing that's missing is a crossfader.

One of the tidiest Midi controllers for the virtual DJ and probably the next best thing to real vinyl.

4.5/5

