

NI Kontrol S61 Mk3

£749

The latest version of NI's keyboard sees heavy Kontakt integration. **James Russell** climbs into the K-hole to check it out

CONTACT WHO: Native Instruments **WEB:** [native-instruments.com](https://www.native-instruments.com) **KEY FEATURES** Kontakt integration, OS now built into hardware rather than relying on Komplete Kontrol software **I/O:** Bus-powered USB-C; USB MIDI; 4 x assignable TRS pedal inputs; MIDI in and out **DIMENSIONS:** 86 x 967 x 323mm **WEIGHT:** 6kg





Six years on from its previous version, and the 'Komplete Kontrol' keyboard range is now updated and renamed, with an expanded set of features.

The Kontrol Mk3 brings a new, more robust spin on the keyboard's chassis, and an interesting new look, right on down to the level of typography. The lightguides are crisper and bolder. Getting hands-on, the feel of the buttons remains mostly the same from the Mk2, while the knobs and wheels have been replaced with anodised aluminium versions. Let's not forget the keys, of course, which feel comparable to most other pro MIDI controllers on the market.

Last but not least, the two screens of the Mk2 have been merged into one larger one for the Mk3. The screen is crisper, larger, and seems brighter in use; no drawbacks. While some have complained that it's not a touchscreen, this feels more like a decision than an omission. Those knobs and buttons are there to offer the tactile accuracy that musicians crave, not a return to smudgy, unresponsive finger-pecking.

One headline feature of the Mk3 is its expanded integration. While the Mk2 had to communicate via the Komplete Kontrol software as an intermediary, NI have given the Mk3 more capabilities to do things itself.

A nod to modern capabilities that doesn't sacrifice functionality

The upshot? Load an instance of Kontakt on an active MIDI channel, and the keyboard will inherit the chosen instrument's parameters for use with the screen and knobs.

Kontakt developers can script what you'll get access to on the screen, so this is quite a future-proof setup. Considering the number of working composers who rely on Kontakt to earn a living, it's no understatement to say that this can be a gamechanger for some. For others, it shows the (hopefully) road towards removing the shackles of Komplete Kontrol and actually using the keyboard directly with any and all NKS2-compatible plugins.

Polyphonic aftertouch is another new feature that sees NI keeping up with modern demands in instrument design. Their implementation works great, and gives the keyboard access to more expressive softsynth features. No full-on MPE is offered, nor does it claim to. Instead it's a nod to modern instrument capabilities that doesn't sacrifice functionality for those who "just want a normal keyboard".

So who should be seriously looking into the Kontrol S61 Mk3 as a purchase? Those who want to take things 'out of the box' and who are already somewhat invested in NI's ecosystem should see it as a serious contender, not a cheap option. Those who own a Mk2 already will be hard to tempt, although heavy Kontakt users may consider it worth their while, especially in the case of those who are moving up to 61 keys from a smaller model. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.4

Likely only heavy Kontakt users will consider the Mk3 upgrade, but if you're new to Kontrol keyboards, the Mk3 remains a serious contender

THE PROS & CONS



Far tighter Kontakt integration

Polyphonic aftertouch offers new ways to use software

New look and feel is a fair upgrade



Some continued reliance on Komplete Kontrol software makes integration a lot less practical