

**INFO****T-SPECS**

- » 2 stereo outputs
- » 2 stereo inputs (line/phono)
- » 1 microphone input
- » 1 headphone output with assignable monitoring
- » 2 controller jog wheels
- » Variable crossfader
- » Three-Band EQ

**VERDICT****PROS**

- » Great value for money
- » Very Stable
- » Direct connections for external devices

**CONS**

- » Documentation is limited
- » Occasionally fiddly
- » Not Macintosh compatible

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★**FEATURES** ★★★★★**USER FRIENDLY** ★★★★★**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★**OVERALL** ★★★★★

# HERCULES DJ CONSOLE MKII MP3 CONTROLLER

WITH EVERYONE'S MP3S COLLECTIONS GROWING, WE CHECK OUT THE LATEST COMPUTER-BASED DJ MIXING PACKAGE FROM HERCULES.

PRICE: £179 INFORMATION: [WWW.HERCULES.COM](http://WWW.HERCULES.COM) CONTACT: 020 7556 7843



**THE** last time we looked at the DJ Console from Hercules it was at their Macintosh version. We thought it was great value for money and also had the stability to allow its use as a decent MP3 DJ controller for DJing in both bedrooms and bars. There were however a distinct lack of features and some irritating design flaws that let the unit down. Now Hercules are back with the MK2 DJ Console and updated Virtual DJ software. So we were naturally interested to see if they'd sorted the old problems and finally fitted the unit with some worthwhile extra features.

The first thing we noticed was that this unit looks far more capable of being used out and about than the previous model. However, sadly on a closer inspection what looks like a metal casing is nothing more than painted plastic. A shame, but in the price range it's understandable.

It certainly has a more professional feel to the knobs and controls though, and the reduced-sized control discs are an improvement on the cumbersome wheels that were far too

easy to knock on the last model. The front also boasts a new switch for monitoring selection which means that you are no longer limited to simply switching channels on or off. Other than this, layout hasn't changed much.

**GET CONNECTED**

The real difference is around the back. The MIDI, surround sound and digital connections have been replaced with inputs for two decks (or CD players) and two outputs which allow the console to connect directly to an external DJ mixer.

This definitely makes it more suitable to DJs, rather than gamers, and means that vinyl can be used along with MP3s through the same device. If you'd rather use the EQ or crossfaders on your present mixer then this too is extremely easy to set up, but does make for a more cluttered setup, with the console to mix MP3s and the mixer to fade and tweak, although it certainly gives more scope. Alternatively, you can record all your records into your computer with great ease via the console and included software and then leave them at home.

**GOING SOFT**

The Virtual DJ software has been overhauled with some definite improvements. Sadly the package doesn't include the cut-down version of Traktor, as found with the Macintosh version,



and the Virtual DJ software included certainly doesn't look as trimmed and professional. That said, there are numerous skins that can be downloaded from the internet, and this allows for a level of visual improvement.

It has far more facilities than the previous version, but we found that most of these could only be accessed using the mouse or computer keyboard, which could prove annoying and occasionally makes the unit feel redundant. The console does contain a mini-stick that can be used to access certain features, but generally this is limited to track selection.

Certainly the best improvements are the new effects. As before, you can assign three of these per channel and switch between them using the console. The effects are straightforward and although they don't leave much room for personal settings they do provide many useful DJ tools including a beat grid which cuts the incoming signal into blocks and plays them back out according to the times you specify. There's also a sliding loop for emulating the classic Fatboy Slim build-up, plus enough filters and flangers to please most DJs.

Overall the software feels a bit cheap and although it ran without a glitch, it just doesn't have the same feel as Traktor. There are too many quirky graphics making the screen look cluttered, which for live DJing could cause headaches, but this can be resolved with skins. That said, we were really impressed with the waveform display for the tracks, which superimposes one over the other and makes it very easy to see when tracks are sliding out of

sync. On top of this, the tempo sync buttons on the console now flash in time to the beat, which is another useful visual aid for keeping everything tight.

**SAMPLE TRIGGER**

Also included in the software is a basic loop and trigger sampler. This can only be controlled via the mouse, and although it nicely time-syncs the samples to the master tempo, it didn't appear to have a vastly practical use, but with time and planning there may be more to this section.

For a small fee you can upgrade to the professional version of Virtual DJ, and this comes with a great deal more. One such extra feature is video DJing, complete with visual scratching facilities. This is possible within the standard version although it is greatly limited and there is little in the way of documentation to explain its use; however this is certainly a very impressive part to the package.

**IN THE MIX**

Generally the new DJ Console is great value for money; it's stable and capable of some nice tricks and effects. The look and feel to the software does let it down, but this can be resolved and there are many capabilities to be discovered over time. The unit has definitely been improved and it's really nice being able to connect external decks directly. There are no plans to release this on the Macintosh, which is a shame, but as with the previous versions, if you are after a cost effective way to DJ with MP3s then this is well worth a look.