

TECH

Numark's BeatKeeper tool helps get the beats in line for beginners

USB port on the front provides quick access

One of the biggest screens on the market provides unique track preview

DIGITAL DIAMOND

The new media player from Numark is put through its paces

SPECS

PRICE
£449

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TECH

- ★ Plays practically any USB memory device
- ★ USB connectors front and rear
- ★ Large backlit display
- ★ Seamless looping, stuttering
- ★ Scratch and search
- ★ Beatkeeper™ BPM technology with tap
- ★ Track waveforms
- ★ Keyboard and USB memory included
- ★ XML playlist support

THE D² Director is a digital media player. It has no storage for music itself and instead relies on the user connecting devices containing MP3, AAC or Wav audio files.

The D² joins the Cortex HDC-1000 and the Denon DN-HD2500 as the third player of this type on review. Similarly, it will play tunes from USB memory sticks, hard drives and MP3 players (such as iPods and even mobile phones) — practically anything with a USB port or USB cable interface.

The D² console is overwhelmed in the centre by its massive screen. This area is dedicated to navigating music and controlling the player's functions. There's loads of space to permanently keep an overview of the two decks, with track text and ID3 tag information, plus pitch settings, a progress bar and times.

Below is the main window. Hit the view button to reveal full tag info for each track (there's no Wav Meta tag support at the

moment), and again to see an overview of the actual audio.

The very bottom row of the screen displays menu choices. These are selected using four soft keys directly under the screen, and a pair of left/right direction keys give access to further menu options when available. On either side of the screen are menu buttons to access different views, utility modes, the library and the D²'s unique Crate feature. The console is designed to keep the menu and navigation separate from the audio player controls, so playback is not accidentally interrupted by using the jog wheel to scroll menus.

UPLOADING TRACKS

The D² comes with a 128MB USB key to get you started. There's not enough room to hold more than an album, but it's useful to upload firmware updates and play fresh content.

Tracks can be copied to any memory device on Mac or PC. The D² can read most file

formats with only read-only limitations for the NTFS format.

As with most media players, the D² needs to build a library of the device's contents before all features work properly. This can be done on the D², but it's much faster to use a computer.

Numark provide Librarian software, which is now PC and Mac compatible. Other than speed, the advantage of using the Librarian software is that it creates a Profile View.

The D² is the first DJ media player available to offer an overview of the peaks and troughs of the music. The tracks appear on top of each other, with the different volume levels represented by different shades and thickness.

The DJ can then compare the play position of the two audio files in the view mode on the D²'s screen. It's even possible to jump to breakdowns and the start of sections using the parameter dial, but this is a bit sluggish to do regularly.

words DAVID ESERIN

NUMARK D² DIRECTOR TECH



Very basic scratching feature

Set cue points on-the-fly and stutter loops



The hook of the D² and other media players is the ability to plug in iPods and even charge them. We plugged in a variety of Mac and PC iPods to test and with some initial problems solved during the review with Firmware updates, we're confident that compatibility issues will be smoothed out. One in particular that we were promised was seamless integration; including iPod playlist support. Similarly to the Cortex player, the D² can also play data and audio CDs from a connected USB CD drive and there is a maximum of 12 devices that can be connected to the D² using a hub.

GEEK SPEAK

- ★ Three unit, 19" rackmount
- ★ Support for USB hubs
- ★ Connect 12 devices
- ★ Seamless looping with stutter-start function
- ★ Pitch control in 6, 12, 25 and -100/+25%
- ★ Large 5" backlit screen with brightness adjustment
- ★ Track profile visualization
- ★ Three USB, two ports
- ★ Plays MP3, Wav and unprotected AAC
- ★ Supports FAT, NTFS (read only) and HFS+ drives
- ★ Fader start
- ★ Software updates for future enhancements
- ★ Audio path: 24-bit

IN THE CRATE

The D² can create playlists really easily and will also read m3u lists saved to your device. But one of the best things about the D² is its Crate feature. The Crate mimics a DJ's record box and provides features that make it as versatile as having the vinyl in front of you.

When searching the Library, the DJ has options to browse by track, artist, album, genre, BPM and so on. The Crate acts like a temporary pool of tunes, so rather than sifting through the entire library for the next track, you can use the Crate to sift through a narrowed-down selection. Whole albums, playlists or genres can be added and deleted, and when it comes to DJing, the Crate provides some really useful tricks.

Each player has four modes for when a track finishes. Manual mode requires the DJ to load up the next track. Automatic mode loads up the next track in the Crate and cues it up at the beginning. Continuous mode loads up the next track and starts to play it straight away (with a crossfade time of one – 12 seconds). These three modes remove the previous track from the Crate once it's been replaced on the deck so you won't play it again. The final mode is Cyclical. This puts the last played track at the bottom of the Crate and continues to play its way through the whole Crate in a cycle — great for early evenings at a bar.

SPECIAL REQUEST

For those moments where you receive a request or decide against a track at that particular time, the Crate allows you to pull a tune back from either player and add it to the top of the list. It will also swap tracks from the Crate to the player, which is extremely handy. Searching and organising tracks into the Crate is made a lot easier using the included mini keyboard. The D² has a whole stack of shortcuts for using the keyboard to navigate around the library, open menus and search for music.

IN THE MIX

Mixing on the D² is really simple, the player buttons are all very clear and getting the mix in time is smooth. The pitch slider is accurate, if not the most solid feeling component, and there are various pitch ranges to choose from. Using the jog wheel to bend the pitch is accurate, but some pitch-bend buttons would be handy. When using the jog wheel to search through tracks, it can be a little slow to respond, and again, dedicated buttons would be preferable. To set a cue point, simply hit pause and play again. The point can be more accurately set by using the jog wheel, which scratches the audio back and forth like a record, rather than the usual stuttered frame playback we normally hear. The play buttons also acts as a stutter, and the cue button simply brings the track back to the cue point and pauses it. Sadly, the D²

has no memory functions for any track settings, such as cue points and loops. There are plans for this in the future.

IN EFFECT

The D² is rather lacking in exciting features for creative mixing. Other than its seamless loop, which works well, there's no fun to be had with reverse, key lock or any effects. There is a scratch feature though, which is pretty basic because the jog wheels aren't touch-sensitive either — making any kind of skilful operation pretty impossible. The scratch sound is surprisingly not too bad, but it has a limited nominal speed; so spinning the platter backwards actually induces a temporary reverse effect, rather than a whirling backspin sound.

The D² has a BPM detection engine, which works pretty well. The DJ can hit the tap button once to set the start of the bar, which then makes the BeatKeeper function track the beats and bars correctly. This gives a visual aid to lining up the beats with its three rows of four lights that represent the beats of the bar. And if the BPM recognition is way off, you can then tap it in manually.

FINAL WORD

The D² benefits from a massive screen, which provides the essential track overview mixing tool, while the record Crate is another unique feature. It best serves the working DJ taking requests and dealing with monstrously massive databases of tunes, but misses a few tricks here and there, which should hopefully be cleared up with firmware updates.★

VERDICT SCORES OUT OF 5

BUILD QUALITY	3.5
SOUND QUALITY	4.0
EASE OF USE	4.5
FEATURES	3.5
VALUE FOR MONEY	4.5

HYPE

Intuitive Crate, large screen and unique track profile feature.

GRIPE

Limited scratch and track memory functions. Still some iPod integration issues being smoothed out.

Working DJs will love this for its clear and simple approach to MP3 mixing.

TECH VERDICT (OUT OF 5)

4.0