

Product review: MIDIJet Pro

WHAT HAVE PIPE organs got to do with e-drums? Surprisingly, the answer is wireless MIDI. In 2004, MIDIWorks launched a device to allow pipe organ technicians to use a portable MIDI keyboard to tune their giant installations. And that's probably where the MIDIJet Pro would have remained had it not been for Michael Brecker looking for a way to play his MIDI wind controller wirelessly.

When U2's Terry Lawless used the device for keyboards and drum triggers on the Vertigo tour, MIDIJet entered the mainstream.

So why would e-drummers be interested? Exhibit A is the Zendrum, the portable MIDI trigger array which can be worn like a guitar and played on the move. Of course, it needs to be tethered to a power supply and a module, meaning a cumbersome MIDI cable.

Zendrum has been fitting MIDIJet Pros into its instruments as a custom install (and retro-fit) item for some time, but **digitalDrummer's** test was done on a stock-standard Z4. (Zendrum and MIDIJet collaborated to provide a battery-powered solution for the Zendrum itself.)

What's in the box

The kit consists of two MIDIJet Pro USB boxes – a black transmitter and a white receiver (and yes, they do need to be plugged

into the appropriate device, or they won't have anything to transmit and receive – trust me!).

You'll also get a 7.5 v external power supply, some batteries and a belt clip.

There's also an easy-to-follow user manual, and set-up is a breeze, especially since the two units have already been synced at the factory. It really is plug and play – provided you connect the transmitter to MIDI Out and the receiver to MIDI In.

In action

The two 'boxes' are identical on the outside, but clearly one needs 'internal' power for the transmitter, and you'll need to pop a couple of AA batteries into that one.

When it's powered up, you'll see the power light illuminated. The receiver can be powered either by battery, mains (using the adaptor) or USB, if you're connecting to a computer. Again, the power light goes on and the blinking connect light lets you know that there's some MIDI communication.

I tested the MIDIJet Pro with a Zendrum and with a Korg padKONTROL, connecting both to various drum modules and to a MacBook Pro running Reaper and various VSTs. I used both MIDI In





A no-fuss design makes the MIDIJet Pro easy to use

and USB connections and also experimented with an AudioBox USB.

In all the applications, the connection was flawless. Whether using external power or USB bus power, the receiver found the transmitter the moment it was switched on.

The new generation has a built-in MIDI-USB interface, eliminating the need for a separate interface and, I suspect, reducing latency a touch.

On the latency front, MIDIJet quotes a measure of - 2.7ms. In reality, there was a very slight sluggishness; for example, when the Zendrum was connected to a module and I was playing 16th notes through the MIDIJet, compared to a 20 foot MIDI cable. But the delay was almost imperceptible compared to a MIDI cable through the AudioBox USB. In other words, the internal MIDI-USB translation is no slower than the MIDI transmission into an interface and then translated into USB.

MIDIJet quotes a range of 500 feet – way beyond the recommended maximum cable length for MIDI. I tested it close to that limit – and continued to get reliable triggering even through walls, although that’s not recommended.

The final word

The Canadian-made MIDIJet Pro kit sells for around \$450 and virtually stands alone in its market segment. There are a couple of competing products, but one appears to be discontinued and the other looks like it’s almost impossible to find.

The MIDIJet Pro is compact enough to wear on your Zen strap, looks and feels tough and resilient and, most importantly, is totally plug and play. There’s no stuffing around and very little scope to plug the things in anywhere but the right place.

Sure, there’s a touch of latency, but almost not enough to notice and certainly not enough to detract from the freedom provided by cutting the umbilical cord to the module or computer. Zendrummers, in particular, will revel in the ability to walk around and show off their instrument. If you’re considering ordering a brand new Zendrum, don’t skip past the MIDIJet Pro option without giving it some thought. The built-in option is by far the most elegant – and it’ll cost less than trying to get it retrofitted – or doing it yourself.

In short, the MIDIJet Pro simply works – and works simply enough for the average e-drummer to plug, play and enjoy. Whether you need mobility or simply want to transmit MIDI across distance - for example, from your e-kit to a DAW on the mixing desk at the back of the venue - this is an elegant solution that won’t break the bank. And, of course, if you ever decided to start tuning pipe organs for a hobby, you’ll be set for that, too.

SPECIFICATIONS

- Range:** 500 feet
- Transmission:** Bi-directional on 2.4 GHz licence-free band
- Latency:** - 2.7ms
- Transmitter battery life:** 20-30 hours
- Warranty:** One year
- Street price:** \$450

