

## NEW XONE: ALLEN & HEATH MIXER

By Wesley Bryant-King

The last time I reviewed an Allen & Heath product for these pages (back in 2010), the company was owned by D&M Holdings (now D+M Group), owner of brands like Denon and Marantz. This past summer, however, the company was sold to a U.K.-based private equity firm, returning the Cornwall, England-based company to British ownership. So far, it appears the ownership change has neither altered the character of the company, nor its commitment (through its Xone line) to the DJ marketplace.

In fact, so far this year, Allen & Heath has released a pair of sister mixer products, the Xone:23, and the Xone:23C. Both are 2-channel mixers, with the latter including an integral computer audio interface. The subject of this review, however, is the regular Xone:23 model.

**First Impressions:** The Xone:23 offers very much what one might expect of a typical 2-channel DJ mixer—and a couple of surprising extras.

Allen & Heath refers to it appropriately as a “2+2” mixer; in the strictest sense, there are four inputs, with four corresponding gain controls. However, channels 1 and 3 are phono inputs, while 2 and 4 are line-level inputs—all RCA. And there are still just two channel faders, so the workflow remains strictly 2-channel for practical applications.

While we’re talking about RCA jacks, one of the “extras” the Xone:23 offers is an FX send/receive loop, allowing the addition of off-board external effects hardware. Master outs are provided via XLR connections, while both monitor and record outs are RCA. In front, there are dual headphone jacks (both ¼- and ⅛-inch), and up top is an XLR microphone input. There are dedicated gain, treble and bass knobs for the mic—a nice touch for mobile jocks and others who do their fair share of MCing during their gigs.

Another noteworthy surprise, although unrelated to the unit’s function, is that it’s manufactured in the U.K. Given the roughly \$300 street price, that’s a major surprise. On many of its recent models, Allen & Heath has used Asian contract manufacturers to assemble some of them, keeping keep costs down. Seeing “Made in U.K.” on the back panel was unexpected.

Apparently, the price point didn’t translate to corner-cutting on the construction quality. The all-metal housing feels robust, despite the unit’s light weight—probably due in part to the fact that the power supply is off-board; while it is a brick, it’s not a “wall wart,” and instead comes with a proper, standard detachable power cord. Well, there are two, in fact; one with the North American standard plug, and one with the U.K. standard plug.

Up top, I love the “typical-of-Allen-&-Heath” quality and just-right resistance to movement of the channel faders. The crossfader is an exception; it moves with the slightest touch, which probably suits the many DJs who use them. The knobs have a great feel as well, with just the right resistance to movement. Clearly the company has this sort of thing down after so many years of successful mixer manufacturing.

Finally, for monitoring levels, the unit has a 9-segment stereo level meter



**Xone:23: Affordable with A&H quality.**

using bar LEDs, spanning -20db to +10db. LEDs are also used to backlight key buttons, including external on, HPF, LPF, and the dual cue and filter buttons.

**Set-Up & Use:** Set-up is straightforward using the aforementioned jacks. While some additional flexibility in terms of jack types might have been nice, in truth, what’s offered are what one might use most frequently, plus there’s precious little space on the back panel to support anything beyond what’s there. In any case, putting the Xone:23 in place for most DJs is a matter of unplugging the old, and plugging in the new.

The Xone:23 uses a pretty much industry-standard knob-and-fader configuration, so any experienced DJ will be at home immediately. The unit offers tri-band EQ, with “total-kill” attenuation.

One particularly welcome feature of the Xone:23 is the inclusion of Allen & Heath’s legendary high- and low-pass filters, with both resonance and frequency knobs to control the effect. I can’t put my fingers on just what’s different about Allen & Heath’s implementation of these filters vs. the competition, but I’ve always felt most at home using them on an Allen & Heath.

While the Xone:23 offers a crossfade shape control, it doesn’t offer a way to disable it completely, which is a serious disappointment. I know a lot of us use crossfaders, but I’ve always been from the “anti” camp, and work solely with level faders for my mixes. I suppose there’s always a touch of gaffer’s tape around to hold the crossfader in the middle position—a step I wish wasn’t so necessary, so much of the time, with today’s mixers.

**Conclusions:** The ability to disable the crossfader would make the Xone:23 a home run for me. But even without that feature, the Xone:23 is a strikingly handsome, well-made, 2-channel DJ mixer with a surprisingly affordable price point that’s within easy reach of anyone from hobbyists to hardcore pro users. Usable with conventional DJ approaches using vinyl turntables or CDJs, or with “scratch” digital DJing (with the appropriate external sound card interface), I’m sure it’d find a welcome home with nearly any DJ.

If you have any questions for Wesley Bryant-King or Sounding Off, please send them to [djtimes@testa.com](mailto:djtimes@testa.com).