

# X-Tempo Pok (\$599 list)

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*Wireless footswitch controller for DAWs*

[www.x-tempozone.com](http://www.x-tempozone.com)

By Craig Anderton

Austin wasn't that hot a Summer NAMM show, but there were a few surprises—and for those into DAWs and software control, the pok foot controller was at the top of the list.

The premise is simple: pok is a wireless foot controller with eight programmable switches you can assign to keyboard equivalents within software on Mac or Windows, whether you're talking Pro Tools, Live, Logic, Sonar, etc. (or Microsoft Word, for that matter).

As someone who usually has two hands busy while recording, I've been a fan of hands-on control ever since I came up with a punch-in footswitch mod for the Teac 3340, which TASCAM (and other companies) subsequently incorporated into their recorders. The concept of hands-free control took a big step forward with the DigiTech GNX-4, which included a .DLL that let Sonar, Pro Tracks Plus, and other Cakewalk software recognize it as a control surface. At that point, you could use the various footswitches to arm tracks, go into record, rewind, stop, play, etc. Very cool.



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*Fig. 1 (click to enlarge): The wireless foot controller has eight switches, but these can also respond to “double-clicks”*



*and to using one of the footswitches as a “shift” key.*

*Fig. 2 (click to enlarge): The USB receiver is class-compliant—no special drivers are required—and plugs into any available USB port on Mac OS X and Windows XP machines.*

But pok takes that further, by letting you assign virtually any key command to any footswitch. At the computer end of things, you need to insert a USB receiver for the wireless signals. It’s about the same size as a standard USB memory stick, and is more sensitive than I would have expected—I was able to trigger commands reliably about 40 feet away from the computer, with walls, metal, and plenty of objects between the controller and computer (a signal-strength LED glows yellow when you get out of range).

The footswitch controller uses three batteries (included). It would have been nice to have an AC adapter jack as well just in case you find a semi-permanent position for the footswitch in your studio, but so far, the batteries have lasted a long time—I’m still on the set that came with the unit. There’s a low voltage level indicator that glows red when it’s time to change batteries.

A TOUCH OF CLASS



*Fig. 3 (click to enlarge): The complete pok package. The foot controller itself is toward the bottom of the foam-padded, high-impact plastic case; above it are the manual, USB receiver, software CD, and Quick Start guide.* Given that pok is from a new company, I must say I was surprised at the quality and care behind the product, from packaging to documentation to the unit itself. The footswitch box itself is sturdy, built in the USA (imagine that!), and places the footswitches far enough apart so you don't have to be too careful when stepping on them to make sure you hit the right target. It comes in a foam-padded case, which protects it even further.

Although I was initially taken aback by the price—\$599 list, around \$499 street—I have to admit that I can see where the money went. Coming up with any kind of wireless product (and getting the FCC's blessing) is not a trivial undertaking, and given the solid construction, this seems to be a company that doesn't want to see any units coming back once they're out in the field.

## GETTING STARTED

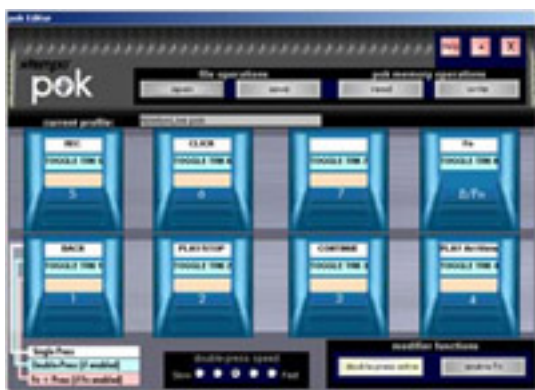
Setting up the pok is easy. You plug the USB receiver into your computer, bring the pok to within two inches of the receiver, and hit any footswitch—the pok and computer are now communicating.

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Next, you install the editor software (Mac OS X or Windows XP). Note that this doesn't need to be running to use pok, it's only for programming different templates. As pok comes pre-loaded with a template for Pro Tools, I booted up Pro Tools LE on the Mac, hit some footswitches, and...yup, worked perfectly. Total time from opening box to controlling Pro Tools: Under five minutes.

As that was way too easy, I figured I'd throw it a challenge and generate control messages for Word, to see if I could make writing this article any easier.

## EDITING POK



*Fig. 4 (click to enlarge): The pok editing program; this shows the Windows version. You can customize the switch names as well as the function keys they control.*

Actually, pok does more than you might think because in addition to single footswitch presses, you can also do double-presses (with a specified time for how fast you need to press the second time for it to be recognized) *and* enable "Fn" mode so you can designate one key as a function switch ("shift key") to gain seven additional functions. All in all, that means you can tie 23 different key equivalents to the footswitches.

Editing is very easy. When you call up the editor, you're presented with a graphic representation of the foot controller.



Fig. 5 (click to enlarge): The Key Definition Editor is where you program the individual footswitches. To edit an individual switch, you click on it. This opens up the Key Definition Editor, which will look something like the shot to the left.

To program, you click on the white, blue, or pink stripe, depending on whether you want to program the single press, double press, or function key option. Next, you click on “Start Capture,” hit the keys you want to assign (e.g., Ctrl-Z), then click on “Stop Capture.” You can then program other switch options, or just hit “Save and Close.”

After programming all the switches, you click on “Write” under “pok memory operations.” This tripped me up at first, because I thought clicking on “Save and Close” was all that was needed to retain the settings. However, after a quick call to tech support, I found out you have to click on “Write” on the main edit window. (Of course, if you want to save the template, you also need to click on “Save” under file operations.) The company said they would revise their Quick Start to make this more obvious.

## CONCLUSIONS

Yeah, it’s kinda pricey, but pok is a quality product and more importantly, it’s eminently useful. Take it with you into the vocal booth to control your takes, hit the buttons with your feet when you’re playing guitar or keyboards, and create templates for any programs you want—not just musical ones (pok will control whatever has the focus at any given moment). It’s ultra-simple to use, reliable, and comes pretty darn close to being a robot engineer. I’m really glad

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I stumbled on this at Summer NAMM, because it streamlines the recording process dramatically for solo performers and engineers (and for those using a computer in live performance, it's a dream come true). This is a creative, useful, hip accessory—two thumbs up.