Ortek Eagletouch MCK-90 Mini Silver USB Keyboard with USB Hub

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Product: Ortek Eagletouch MCK-90 Mini Silver USB
Keyboard with USB Hub
Rating: 93%
Manufacturer: Ortek
Purchased from: Scorpion Technology

Introduction

For the majority of us, using a keyboard is one of the main ways we interface with our computers. Unless you're an avid fan of Voice Recognition Technology or some other weird and wonderful typing method.

The keyboard has been around forever it would seem - especially the now-standard QWERTY layout which was designed in 1868 by Christopher Sholes, the inventor of the type-writer, to make it easier to type by spreading the more used keys around the keyboard. An alternative to the standard QWERTY keyboard is Dvorak, designed in the 1930's in such a way that the most common keys are on the centre row of the keyboard. Today, however, we're going to take a look at an 89 key QWERTY style mini-keyboard from Ortek.

Functional, smart, stylish, small and cool. All these terms could be used to describe the Eagltetouch MCK90. But lets start at the beginning, with a brief list of specifications.

Specifications

- 89 Key Layout with the Functionality of 104 keys.
- Supports Multimedia and ACPI Functions
- High quality membrane switches for longer life.
- Available as PS/2 or USB version.
- Embedded Numeric Keyboard with NUM Lock.
- 100% USB Compliant with Spec 1.1 and Class Definition 1.1 HID (USB Version)
- Two additional bus powered ports for low power devices. (USB+Hub version)
- 11 programmable buttons including web, sound, and DVD controls.

- Available in silver, white, and black.
- OSD via software support.
- Weighs 564 grams.

All this from a keyboard measuring only 320mm by 145mm with only 30mm height at the highest point.

Packaging

The keyboard arrives in a fairly cool retail package -

which just happens to have most of the specs listed on the front.

The keyboard comes with a relatively simple amount of inclusions - the keyboard itself, a short user manual, and a CD-ROM with the software for the "Mini-Media" functions, as they term the programmable multimedia buttons.

My keyboard arrived in perfect condition, no scratches or any defects - which is testement mainly to the packaging of Scorpion Technology from whom I purchased this product - no less than two different layers of bubble-wrap were used to protect the keyboard.

Features - USB Hub & Feet

The USB version of the keyboard features a two-port USB hub. The hub is powered via the system's USB port that the actual keyboard is plugged into (note, this has to be a powered port as the keyboard requires 100mA from a powered USB port to function). Because of this, some higher power devices requiring say the full 500mA available to a USB device may not function correctly using the USB hub. The two USB ports are well disguised under the edges of the keyboard in an extrusion that also forms the feet, and holds the rather-useless flip down extension feet. Because of this the keyboard cannot be set flat, and if higher elevation is required, the flip down feet will only merit maybe a centimeter at best. I tested the USB ports with my Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer V3.0, and the result was as-per-expectations, plug-and-play.

Features - Multimedia Keys & Software

The layout of the top of the keyboard is as follows:

- Back
- Forward
- WWW
- E-Mail
- Mute
- Volume Down
- Volume Up
- Num Lock Indicator
- Caps Lock Indicator
- Scroll Lock Indicator
- Previous Track
- Stop
- Play/Pause
- Next Track
- Wake
- Sleep
- Power

The Num, Caps and Scroll Lock Indicators are all green LED's, which appear to have been sanded flat (and diffused). In my opinion this looks quite good, however personal preference may differ to blue or red for the sake of matching other peripherals.

All the buttons from Back through to Next Track are supposed to be programmable (using the software provided), however I discovered that only the first seven keys (all those to the left of the Indication LEDs) are truly programmable. The playback controls can be used to control PowerDVD, WinDVD, or the software's built-in media player, however they cannot be pointed to external executables. I find this to be a bit of a pain as I have a set of executables for Winamp 2.x that give these four options external from Winamp.

Because I have a mouse with 5-buttons however, I don't need the Back/Forward web buttons on the keyboard and hence I bound those to back/next track. Using these keys causes the software to set focus away from the active program (in this case my word processing software) - because of the way the software is written so that if you press for example the WWW key, it doesn't just open up your Internet Browser of choice, but it also brings it into focus. This doesn't happen with the Volume Up/Down buttons however the OSD may cause issues with games (the OSD can be disabled in the software).

Software wise, you don't actually need to DO anything for the MCK90 to function as a keyboard; other than plugging it in. It's HID 1.1 compatibility means that most versions of Windows should detect it "automagically" and allow you to begin typing within seconds. If you want the OSD and your multimedia buttons to function, you will however have to install the software. Installation is simple affair, just pop in the CD and it autoruns the installer, key in the serial number (from the front of the CD), tell it where to install; and does just that, adding itself to your Startup folder in the process. It also tells you to reboot, which you don't actually have to if you're using Windows 2000 or XP (Win9x Users may have to), all you really need to do is just open the software from the Start-Menu.

Target Audience

The following is a summary of some uses I can think up for such a keyboard

- Laptop users who don't like having to go from a laptop size keyboard to a normal size keyboard and back every time they use their home PC.
- In the workplace, where style and functionality have to mix (anywhere where numerical input isn't a big thing - i'll get to that soon).
- Gamers who need a portable, small, easy to use keyboard without lugging around a full size job every time they take their system away.
- Anyone else who needs a portable input device - Car PC's, corded HomeTheatre PC's, people who don't like using a keyboard others have used for health reasons.

I can't imagine that the average desktop PC will be suited to the use of one of these keyboards though - funky it may be, but for anyone with larger than average hands, it hurts. I actually used to type this review until about the end of the packaging section, then had to have a break as my hands were hurting from being cramped up in such a small space.

How It Performs

As I said in the last section, I personally experienced discomfort typing in such a small area. The discomfort may also have something to do with the flat layout of the keyboard (you may have noticed, normal keyboards have a tiered approach to key layout). I've noticed several issues with use of the keyboard due to the layout of the keys, and several pro's over the laptop keyboards i've used - see below.

Pros:

- Has Windows and Right Click Index Menu keys
- Fn key is on/off, not hold-while-you-use
- Layout in general is very similar to my IBM RapidAccessKeyboard III - (placement of backspace, enter, \)
- Keys make a distinct click and have a depressed feel to them even though they don't have a great amount of travel when pushed.
- Arrow keys are a reasonable location and size

Cons:

- No indicator light for Fn key status
- No right hand side Control key - this can cause problems for people in the habit of Shift+Ctrl+arrow key text selecting techniques with one hand.
- People used to pressing Shift+Del with one hand may have issues, as the PageUp key is where I instinctively push on this keyboard for that action.

- Home & End are difficult to find while not used to the keyboard
- Left Arrow, Up Arrow, and Space cannot all be pushed at the same time, which is annoying for racing and driving games like Need For Speed, Colin Mcrae, and Grand Theft Auto.
- The function key is half-way between the normal left hand side control & windows key location, which can cause accidental activation of it.
- Some users may find themselves pressing scroll-lock instead of backspace often.

Typing on the board isn't particularly hard, but can take a while to get used to. Touch-typers will be happy, the standard extrusions announcing the presence of home keys (F and J) are present. Only having the one windows key on the board didn't bother me in the slightest, as I (and I suspect many others) only use the left-hand one anyway. Where the right hand side Control and Windows keys normally preside, the Context menu key has been shifted one key left, and Insert and Delete have been added. This makes for pressing CTRL-ALT-DEL easier for users having to login to Windows 2000 & some installs of XP, and is a must for anyone still using Windows 9x =Þ.

While the keyboard offered NUMpad functions when the Fn key was pressed, use of it was slightly dis-orienting as the keys aren't aligned with one-another vertically - it also lacks the numpad vesion of Enter (Everything else is there). Basically the manufacturers have just cut down on any doubled-up keys, which while a good idea, may take a little getting-used-to for the seasoned typist.

Suggestions

As follows are some suggestions I can make for the manufacturers of this product should they release a new version of this product -

- Add a Function key status indicator to the middle of the keyboard with the other LEDs (there's plenty of room) similar to on the Logitech Keyboards
- Add some sort of option to the software allowing it to make a noise using the PC speaker when the Fn key is pressed (Similar to Microsoft's Accessibility tool "ToggleKeys" for Numpad, Scroll Lock, and Capslock)
- Add an option to the software so that the user can decide which buttons on the keyboard take focus away from the window they are using.
- Add the ability to change the playback key functions further than just for use with the inbuilt media player or DVD programs.
- Look at reworking the keyboard circuits to allow for multiple keypresses like Up, Left and Space to function correctly.

And to the end user, if you find yourself pressing the Power button by accident, you may wish to disable this in Windows (Display properties, Screensaver, Power Options).

Overall Summary

Overall, provided you fit into one of the target categories, and can handle having to use a tightly bunched keyboard, this particular item should do exactly what you want, exactly how you want to do it. It's also worth remembering that it's available also as a PS/2 model, the cable is colored the same as the keyboard, and the keyboard is also available in Black or Beige (See below)

Black and beige version photos taken from manufacturers website.

Personally, I purchased this keyboard for temporary use with a few projects I've got in progress - my new testbed, CarPC, and HTPC are all at various stages of completeness. As such, because of the pain experienced through extended use I won't be considering using one of these keyboards as my primary keyboard, instead I think I'll stick with my current IBM RAK-III (even if there isn't any software for it's multimedia buttons).

The size of the MCK90 allows it to be sat on top of even the most humble monitor, I used it here today sitting on top of one of my old 14" monitors after installing a CPU for an aquaintance.

I'm going to give it a rating of 93% since it fits what I see as it's target audience, but isn't 100% free of problems.

I'm also going to award it the OCmelbourne.com Editor's Choice award.

Interested in buying an EagleTouch MCK90 Keyboard as reviewed in this article? They are available from Scorpion Technology for $65 at the time of publication, and also from AusPCMarket.

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This text was adapted for print from the article located at http://www.ocmelbourne.com/reviews/mck90/