

Roland MC-101 vs Novation Circuit Tracks Groovebox: Specs, Reviews & Price

Meta Description: Compare the Roland MC-101 vs Novation Circuit Tracks grooveboxes. Discover key differences in sound engines, sequencing, and pricing to find your ideal fit.



Alt text: The Roland MC-101 with colored buttons.

Key Takeaways

- The Roland MC-101 features the ZEN-Core Synthesis System with legendary sounds from the TR-808, TR-909, JUNO-106, and SH-101, while the Novation Circuit Tracks offers two refined polyphonic synth engines with extensive sample loading.
- Roland provides a 4-track sequencer optimized for electronic/dance music with advanced USB audio interface capabilities, while Novation delivers 8 tracks total (2 synth, 4 drum, 2 MIDI) with comprehensive connectivity to external gear.
- Both grooveboxes offer true portability—the MC-101 runs approximately 4.5 hours on 4 AA NiMH rechargeable batteries, while the Circuit Tracks features a built-in rechargeable battery providing up to 4 hours of mobile production.

- The Circuit Tracks includes full-size 5-pin MIDI in/out/thru, plus an analog sync out, for seamless studio integration, while the MC-101 offers 5-pin MIDI in/out alongside its advanced USB audio interface for DAW recording.
- At [Sam Ash](#), you can get both portable grooveboxes with expert guidance, multiple financing options, a 45-day return policy, and free shipping on orders over \$49.99.

Two Philosophies of Portable Production

The groovebox category has exploded as producers seek complete music-making tools that travel anywhere inspiration strikes. The Roland MC-101 and Novation Circuit Tracks represent two of the most capable affordable options, each bringing distinct strengths to portable production.

The Roland MC-101 inherits the DNA of Roland's legendary instruments. Its ZEN-Core Synthesis System delivers the sounds that defined electronic music, TR-808, TR-909, JUNO-106, and SH-101, in a pocket-sized package that doubles as an advanced USB audio interface.

The Novation Circuit Tracks prioritizes an immediate, hands-on workflow designed to eliminate creative barriers. Its 8-track architecture (2 synth, 4 drum, 2 MIDI), velocity-sensitive pads, and comprehensive connectivity make it equally capable as a standalone production center or the brain of a larger hardware setup.

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Roland MC-101: Features & Specs



Caption: For producers who want authentic Roland character wherever they create, the MC-101 brings the studio legacy to the road.

Alt text: Roland MC-101 Groovebox.

[The Roland MC-101](#) brings the sounds that defined electronic music to a truly portable format. It's not just a sketch pad for ideas—it's a professional production tool capable of creating fully-fledged tracks anywhere, anytime.

ZEN-Core Synthesis System

The MC-101's defining feature is Roland's ZEN-Core Synthesis System, their most advanced synth engine to date. This goes far beyond simple sample playback, delivering the actual synthesis architecture that made Roland instruments legendary.

The unit includes authentic recreations of Roland's most influential machines: the TR-808, which defined hip-hop and electronic music; the TR-909, which shaped house and techno worldwide; the JUNO-106, the polyphonic synth behind countless classic records; and the SH-101, which established foundational bass and lead sounds across electronic genres.

4-Track Sequencer

The MC-101's sequencer is optimized for modern electronic and dance production. Create drum, bass, and synthesizer patterns using 16 RGB pads, freely combining loops and one-shots with melodic phrases.

Import your own MIDI sequences and audio recordings, compose and chain scenes or clips, record real-time automation, and resample your creations for further manipulation. The 4-track architecture maintains focus while providing sufficient flexibility for complete productions.

Advanced USB Audio Interface

A standout MC-101 feature is its advanced USB audio interface capability. Record entire mixes through a single USB cable, capture all four tracks to individual DAW tracks for detailed editing, sample sounds directly from your DAW, and load backing tracks and stems for live performance—all without requiring a separate audio interface. This integration makes the MC-101 uniquely suited for producers working fluidly between hardware and software environments.

Pricing

The Roland MC-101 is available at Sam Ash for \$571.99, with 24-month financing available at approximately \$24 per month.

Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 5 **Amazing Box**

a drum machine workstation. 4 tracks but with a daw it doesnt matter, records tight, timing is tight. sounds amazing, you can load up your samples and the fx sound greats.

Caption: A reviewer highlights tight recording and timing performance, impressive sound quality, the ability to load custom samples, and effects that deliver excellent results.

Alt text: Customer review.

One satisfied customer describes the MC-101 as a drum machine workstation that punches above its weight. While the unit offers four tracks, integration with a DAW renders that limitation irrelevant for many workflows.

Novation Circuit Tracks: Features & Specs



Caption: For producers who value speed and intuition, the Circuit Tracks accelerates creativity.

Alt text: Novation Circuit Tracks Groovebox.

[The Novation Circuit Tracks](#) is engineered for immediacy—a groovebox that eliminates barriers between ideas and finished music. Its hands-on workflow, comprehensive connectivity, and powerful sequencer make it equally capable as a standalone instrument or the control center of a larger setup.

Hands-On Creative Workflow

Circuit Tracks' greatest strength lies in its intuitive, menu-free workflow philosophy. No complex menus or endless scrolling interrupt the creative flow—just immediate access to all functions that keep inspiration moving forward.

Build intricate synth parts with ease, effortlessly construct sequences, and stay focused on making the music you envision. This design approach means less time navigating interfaces and more time creating.

8-Track Architecture

The Circuit Tracks provide double the track count of the MC-101 through a thoughtfully divided architecture. Two polyphonic synth tracks feature refined digital synthesis engines with hundreds of artist-created presets and full patch editing via Components software to create a unique sonic palette.

Four drum tracks allow you to load your own samples and shape them to perfection, with over three minutes of sample time per pack across 64 sample slots. Two dedicated MIDI tracks control external synthesizers, program external drum machines, and send notes with CC automation to pilot your entire studio from one central hub.

Comprehensive Connectivity

Connectivity is where Circuit Tracks truly distinguishes itself. Full-size 5-pin MIDI In, Out, and Thru jacks plus USB MIDI enable complete integration with external gear. Two mono audio inputs allow processing external audio through the internal effects, while stereo outputs and a dedicated headphone output handle monitoring needs.

A 3.5mm analog sync output connects vintage gear that predates MIDI. This connectivity positions Circuit Tracks as the brain of a larger hardware setup—a role the MC-101's more limited connectivity options don't support as fully.

Pricing

The Novation Circuit Tracks is available at Sam Ash for \$469.99, with 24-month financing available at approximately \$20 per month.

Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 5 **Immediate Results**

Very straightforward device that has a lot of room for growth as well. Out of the box with the factory sounds and presets can result in endless possibilities for creating songs all self-contained in this neat little box. Playing melodies on the pads and sequencing drums feels very natural and intuitive. Once you plug this thing into the computer to load up your own samples, or adjust the presets of the synth engines the possibilities are literally endless at that point, plus this thing plays very nicely with external synths and drum machines through MIDI.

Caption: A verified customer shares their experience with the Novation Circuit Tracks.

Alt text: Customer review of the Novation Circuit Tracks.

Reviewers consistently praise the Circuit Tracks as a straightforward device with substantial room for growth. Out of the box, factory sounds and presets enable endless possibilities for creating self-contained songs within this compact unit.

Playing melodies on the pads and sequencing drums feels natural and intuitive. Once connected to a computer to load custom samples or adjust synth engine presets, the possibilities become virtually limitless.

Overall Comparison: Roland MC 101 vs Novation Circuit Tracks Groovebox

Feature	Roland MC-101	Novation Circuit Tracks
Sam Ash Price	\$571.99	\$469.99
Price Difference	\$102 more	—
24-Month Financing	\$24/month	\$20/month
Sound Engine	ZEN-Core Synthesis System	2 Polyphonic Digital Synths
Tracks	4	8 (2 synth + 4 drum + 2 MIDI)
Pads	16 RGB multi-colored	32 RGB velocity-sensitive
Sequencer	4-track, pattern/clip-based	32-step, chainable to 256 steps
Sample Loading	Yes (via SD card)	Yes (3+ minutes via microSD)
Legacy Sounds	TR-808, TR-909, JUNO-106, SH-101	Artist-made presets
MIDI	5-pin In/Out + USB	5-pin In/Out/Thru + USB
Audio Interface	Yes (advanced USB)	Class-compliant USB
Audio Inputs	No	2 mono inputs
Analog Sync	No	Yes (3.5mm sync out)
Battery	~4.5 hours (4x AA NiMH) / ~3 hours (alkaline)	~4 hours (rechargeable)
Effects	Per-track + master	Reverb, delay, sidechain, compressor

Why Buy Your Groovebox from Sam Ash

Choosing the right groovebox means understanding how different design philosophies support different creative approaches, and at [Sam Ash](#), we provide the expertise to help you navigate that decision.

Our Gear Expert Team includes working producers who grasp the distinctions between Roland's synthesis heritage and Novation's workflow-first philosophy. They can demonstrate how each unit supports different production styles and help you identify which groovebox aligns with your creative process.

Flexible financing makes quality production tools accessible. The Roland MC-101 is available at approximately \$24 per month over 24 months, while the Novation Circuit Tracks comes in at around \$20 per month over the same term.

Our 45-day [return policy](#) gives you time to integrate your new groovebox into your production workflow, test it on real projects, and confirm it inspires the creativity you're seeking. If the fit isn't right, you have the flexibility to make a change.

Sam Ash delivers additional value with every purchase. [Free shipping](#) applies to orders over \$49.99, and our 60-day price protection guarantee means we'll match any lower price you find within that window.

[Ready to get a drum machine? Shop our groovebox collection today!](#)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can I make complete songs on either groovebox?

Yes, both can produce complete, professional tracks. The MC-101's 4 tracks and the Circuit Tracks' 8 tracks (plus MIDI control of external gear) provide enough capability for full productions. In this class, many producers create entire albums on grooveboxes.

Which has better sound quality?

Both produce professional-quality audio. Roland's ZEN-Core engine delivers authentic recreations of legendary instruments with 40+ years of refinement. Novation's synth engines are modern and capable, with an extensive preset library. Sound preference is subjective—audition both if possible.

Can I load my own samples on both?

Yes. The MC-101 accepts samples via SD card with tempo sync and effects processing. The Circuit Tracks offer 3+ minutes of sample time per pack via microSD, easily managed through Components software.

Which is better for live performance?

Both excel in live performances. Circuit Tracks' 32 velocity-sensitive pads and scene-based arrangement optimize live expression. MC-101's legendary sounds and clip-based performance serve electronic/dance contexts. Choose based on your performance style and sound preferences.

Can I get both the Roland MC-101 and Novation Circuit Tracks grooveboxes at Sam Ash?

Yes, [Sam Ash](#) carries both the Roland MC-101 and Novation Circuit Tracks. You can compare detailed specifications and pricing on our website, and our Gear Expert Team is available to answer questions and help you determine which groovebox best matches your creative workflow and production goals.

**Pricing and/or product availability mentioned in this post are subject to change. Please check our [website](#) for current pricing and stock information before making a purchase.*