Logitech’s $100 Adaptive Gaming Kit finishes what Xbox’s XAC started

Enlarge / The four button types included in the 12-button Logitech Adaptive Gaming Kit bundle, along with one of its two “hook-and-loop” mounting boards.

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Last year’s Xbox Adaptive Controller (XAC) heralded a new era of gaming accessibility, but not necessarily in conclusive fashion. What Microsoft’s specially engineered slab of a controller delivered in options and openness, particularly for gamers who can’t use standard gamepads, the device lost in clarity.

The $99 XAC only comes with two useful buttons for standard PC and console games, and Microsoft said that was by design so that special-needs gamers could attach preferred buttons and control options into an array of 19 plugs. This was great news for anybody familiar with the wild world of accessible gaming or who already owned extra attachable buttons. But trouble arose, accessory-maker Logitech says to Ars Technica, when XAC’s good press and popularity drew new, confused people into the fold—and into official Microsoft Stores, to boot.

“We talked to Microsoft retail—to people in the Microsoft Stores—and they kept telling us, ‘We don’t know what to recommend to people,'” Logitech Product Manager Mark Starrett

tells Ars Technica. “People buy an XAC, then ask, ‘What [buttons] should go with this?’ The guy at the store can’t assess the needs. The caregiver doesn’t know [from a gaming standpoint], either.”

Turning “variable” into a constant

- Comes with everything seen here. One of the mounting boards is rigid, while the other includes multiple folding points, like a standard tablet cover.
- Add and remove whatever button-label stickers you want.

That changes this week with the Logitech Adaptive Gaming Kit, which is a $99 bundle that begins answering that basic question for Logitech’s estimated “80%” of special-needs gamers. Logitech offered Ars Technica a pre-brief about the bundle before shipping us a sample set, so we cannot speak to its build quality or whether it’s a worthy purchase.

Still, based on my testing and research since the XAC launched, I’m already compelled to applaud Logitech’s launch, at least in terms of apparent value and usability.

The crux of the Adaptive Gaming Kit is a suite of 12 discrete buttons that connect via XAC’s 3.5mm ports. It’s easier to parse them as a list:

- Three round buttons, 2.6-inch diameter
- Three round buttons, 1.4-inch diameter
- Four “light-touch” buttons
- Two “variable” triggers

Most articles about XAC’s launch included photos of these kinds of buttons, with the idea being that users with various disabilities or needs would buy each one a la carte to add more functionality beyond the XAC and a nearby default Xbox One controller. But it doesn’t take long to reach a $99 spending threshold at 3-4 buttons, which barely covers the

entirety of a standard game's functions. On a sheer price level, Logitech has done the right thing. Target XAC users will likely need no fewer than four discrete buttons, so you're saving money compared to the rest of the fray by going with Logitech's set.

On top of that, Logitech includes two hook-and-loop boards and relevant connecting cables in this bundle. XAC users will likely want to mount extra buttons onto these kinds of boards so that they can remain more stable while near a controlling body part of choice: a foot, a fingerless hand, even a head. And they're a perfect freebie bonus for a set that's already reasonably priced.

To top all of that off, the included "variable" triggers play nicely with XAC's pair of analog 3.5mm ports. Most 3.5mm controller accessories only offer binary "on/off" switch functionality. That's fine for most controller functions but not for one that Logitech identified as a popular genre for special-needs gamers: racing.

"If you look around the [special needs] market… I haven't successfully found a good variable trigger replacement," Starrett says. "If you wanted to use gas and brake in *Forza*, stuff like that, there was no solution. Just binary digital buttons. So we include two of those in the kit. I'm a racer, and so are a lot of people we met. They want to play these games and struggle with this insane, 100% throttle thing."

From 200 joysticks to 99 dollars

Logitech says this project began on the side when Microsoft began asking for loaner joysticks a few years ago to test a secret project. (Starrett says they gave more than 200 joysticks to that aim before finding out what the XAC actually was.) Logitech's design team was looped into the shape, connection protocols, and launch plans for the XAC ahead of its launch, but the team didn't realize how many steps were

left open for potential buyers, in terms of additional buttons, until after launch.

“I’m not gonna blind-read [the Xbox team]’s positions, but they don’t make a lot of peripherals traditionally,” Starrett says. “They make their controllers and consoles. They don’t want to be in the peripheral business at this level, I don’t think. Meanwhile, we’re very expert in this area. We’ve done many things with Microsoft, we’ve supported their platforms for years. It was a natural thing [to team up on an adaptive controller bundle]. They might’ve gone and made one themselves if we hadn’t said, ‘We’re going to do this and work with you.'”

Hence, Microsoft handed Logitech its Rolodex for special-needs gaming researchers and experts, including the UK non-profit Special Effect, a rehab center at Mt. Sinai Hospital, and XAC engineering lead Bryce Johnson. From that point on, Logitech spent the next year designing the controllers while “shaving down the profit margins” to get the bundle’s price point to $99. The resulting bundle is now on sale at logitechg.com and at most American Microsoft Store locations; it’ll come to European Microsoft Stores “if not day one, then shortly after.”

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