

THE “NO-REGRETS” BEGINNER GEAR GUIDE (UNDER \$400)

By David "DJ XL" Jones | Founder, DFW DJ School



DJ Controller Edition



Welcome to the Trade

"What should I buy?"

I've heard that question thousands of times since I started spinning in 1984. Today, the barrier to entry is gone—you can buy a controller for \$89—but the barrier to *quality* is higher than ever.

It's ok to start with a lower end "entry level" controller and learn as opposed to dropping thousands on gear that may confuse and frustrate you.

I wrote this guide to stop you from making those mistakes.

You need a controller cheap enough to be a low risk, but professional enough that you won't outgrow it in two weeks. In 2026, the market is flooded with junk. If you want to learn this trade properly, the controllers in this guide are the only ones under \$400 that I vouch for. Read on.. Let's save you some money.

David "DJ XL" Jones *Est. 1984*

THE WINNER: Pioneer DJ DDJ-FLX4

The "Swiss Army Knife" of Beginner DJing

Specs Box:

- Price: ~\$299 (New)
- Best For: Everyone. Literally everyone.

If you walk into DFW DJ School today and ask me what to buy, this is the answer. It is the successor to the legendary DDJ-400, and it fixes every problem a beginner has.

Why It Wins:

- Software Freedom: It unlocks Rekordbox (club standard) AND Serato DJ Lite (hip-hop standard) for free. You don't have to pick a "team" yet.
- Club Layout: The buttons, knobs, and faders are exactly where they are on the \$3,000 club gear.
- Future Proof: USB-C connectivity and Bluetooth mean you can DJ with just this controller and your phone.

The Verdict: Buy this one. It holds its resale value better than any other gear on this list.





DDJ-FLX4 Software Compatibility

WORKS FREE OUT OF THE BOX

- Rekordbox (Mac/Windows/iOS/Android) *(The Club Standard)*
- Serato DJ Lite *(The Hip-Hop Standard)*

ALSO WORKS WITH.. (Might require paid upgrade)

- djay Pro (Apple/Android) *(Great for mobile mixing on iPad)*
- VirtualDJ *(Plug & play support)*
- Serato DJ Pro *(Requires a paid license upgrade)*



THE BATTLE OPTION: Pioneer DJ DDJ-REV1

The "Scratch DJ" Entry Point



Specs Box:

- Price: ~\$279 (New)
- Best For: Hip-Hop heads and aspiring Turntablists.

If you dream of cutting it up like Jazzy Jeff or A-Trak, the FLX4 might feel a bit "house music." Enter the REV1.

Why Consider It?

- Battle Layout: It mimics professional turntables turned sideways ("battle mode"). The pitch sliders are at the top—perfect for scratching.
- Paddle FX: It uses professional "paddles" to trigger effects, just like high-end competition mixers.

The Downside: It is designed specifically for Serato. If you want to learn Rekordbox later, you're out of luck.

DDJ-REV1 Software Compatibility



WORKS FREE OUT OF THE BOX

- Serato DJ Lite
- Algoriddim DJAY Pro

ALSO WORKS WITH (Paid Upgrade)

- Serato DJ Pro (Requires license)
- VirtualDJ

DOES NOT WORK WITH:

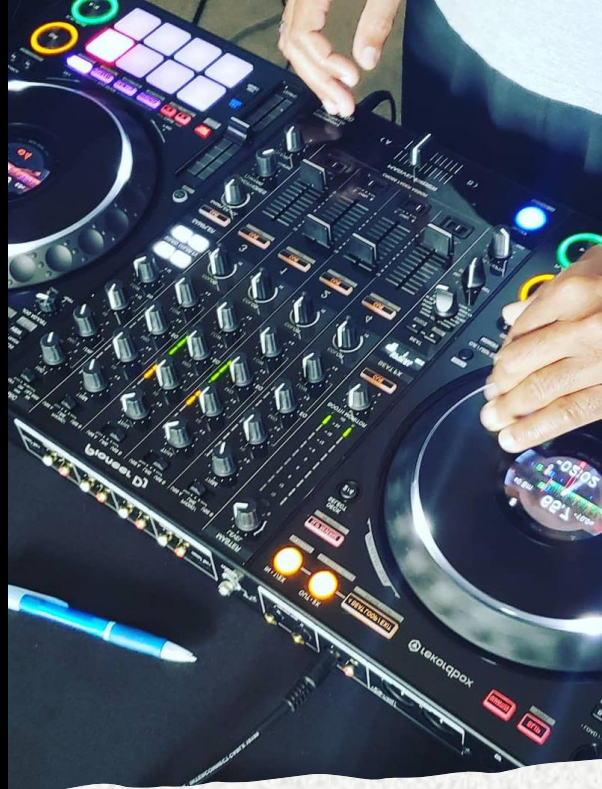
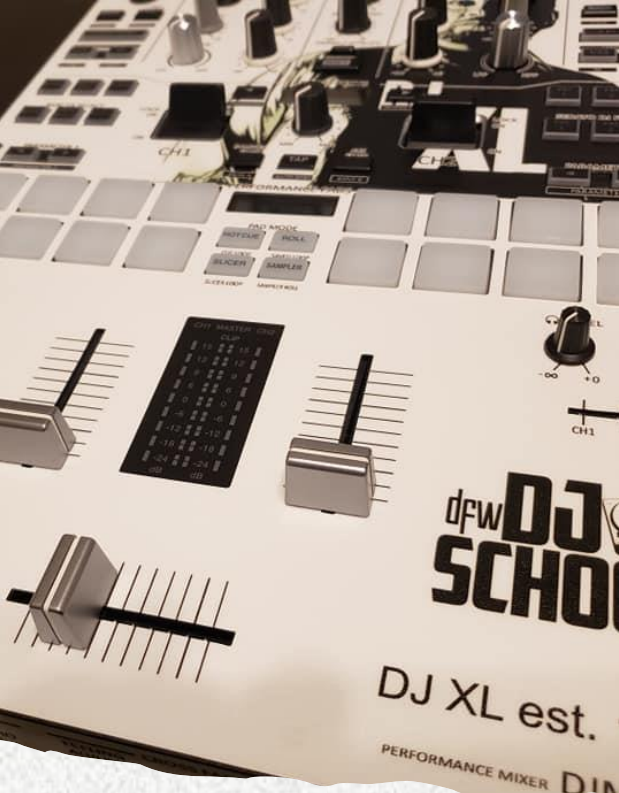
- Rekordbox



Used Throwback Add-In Pioneer DJ DDJ-SB3 (The "Jazzy Jeff" Edition)

- **Status:** Used Market (\$200 - \$250)
- **Native Software:** Serato DJ Lite

The Scoop: The ancestor to the FLX4. It introduced "**Pad Scratch**," a cheat-code feature developed with Jazzy Jeff to perform scratch routines by tapping a pad. Fun to use.



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