

Saitek P120 Action Pad (PC)

Produced By: Saitek

Review By: Tim Maxwell

Overview: A decent, cheap pad for the novice gamer

Good Press: Dirt cheap; the handle that turns it into an analog controller is a nice touch.

Bad Press: The buttons are somewhat unresponsive and there aren't enough of them; sticky triggers; D-pad is less than perfect.

Profile: Control pad

System Requirements: IBM PC or Compatible, Standard PC game port.

Our Ratings:

Ease of Use: 9/10

Compatibility: 9/10

Documentation/Tech Support: 7/10

Feel: 5/10

Value: 8/10

Saitek has developed quite a reputation over the last few years for releasing high-quality joysticks with some pretty innovative features. Joysticks seemed to be their forte until recently when they came out with the Cyborg line of gamepads. The response to these pads was luke-warm at best as many gamers balked at the clunky design and high price. Saitek has vowed to solve both of these problems with their new P120 Action Pad – an inexpensive alternative to offerings by Microsoft and Gravis. The result, however is a mixed bag.

Out of the box, the P120 seems to be a mix of the Sidewinder pad from Microsoft and the Gamepad Pro from Gravis. On the face of the controller, you'll find a circular D-pad and four action buttons in a cross formation. Upon further inspection, you'll find two trigger buttons and a small handle in the bottom which can be attached to the D-pad for more precise control. The controller is a little larger than it needs to be (if you turn it upside-down, you could probably steer a jet with it), but this never comes at the expense of comfort. Getting your P120 set up and ready to roll couldn't be simpler. Once it's plugged in, a quick adjustment in the control panel will have you up and running in no time. That's right, there is no need to worry about driver updates and compatibility problems. The pad should be ready to control just about anything you want without any hassles. Ease of use is definitely not an issue with the P120.

The first game I tested with the P120 was Acclaim's new racer, Re-volt. D-pad control was quick and responsive but I can't say the same for the buttons. Several times, when I went to use a weapon, nothing would happen until the second or third button press. Obviously, this isn't ideal when you're involved in a heated race. Similar problems arose when testing the pad with sports games like NHL '99 and High Heat Baseball 2000. Once your senses are trained to hit the button a little bit harder, this problem might be alleviated, but it can be frustrating to players that are used to certain controllers.

Another potential problem I see with the P120 is the D-pad and it's circular configuration. I used to use a Gravis Gamepad Pro (which has a similar D-pad) for all of my sports and platform games. After some time though, the pad tends to get loose and not control as precisely as you might want. Countless times I threw to second base instead of first in High Heat Baseball, and I had a dickens of a time just choosing the correct battle command in Final Fantasy VII. Eventually I got rid of that pad and bought a Sidewinder, which I find much better. This isn't an issue with the P120 when you first buy it, but it is something to consider for the future.

Another thing to consider is what kinds of games you enjoy playing. If you are a die-hard sports fanatic, I wouldn't recommend this pad. Sports games these days offer extremely advanced control and with only six buttons, you might miss out on many of them. On the other hand, if you enjoy platform or racing games, this controller might be right up your alley. Whatever gaming preferences you might have though, the most telling aspect of the controller has nothing to do with its feel or responsiveness. Many gamers would prefer to spend their hard-earned money on games rather than peripherals. That is where the P120 really shines – in the price department. The retail price is only \$9.99 and that will undoubtedly be a big draw to gamers on a budget – especially since the Sidewinder and Gamepad Pro are still hovering around \$30.

So you're probably wondering if I liked the P120 or not. Well, the answer to that question is yes and no. I personally prefer more buttons and more responsive control. For that, I'm willing to spend an extra \$20. I can tell you this much though, there is no better pad available today for less money than the P120. In fact, there probably isn't a cheaper pad out there at all. If a severe money shortage is holding you back, I would recommend this pad. If, however you have a little more money to burn, the tried-and-true performance of the Sidewinder or Gamepad Pro would be a better alternative.