

Section 5 - The hunt for endgame

So you have an ideal board, ideal switches, and ideal keyset to buy. Yet looking them up yields Out of Stock for each. What gives?

As described in the very first section of this series, the low-quantity high-quality style of custom keyboards and the unique sales formats that come with it make purchasing alone a challenge. Time to learn the typical flow of keyboard product sales to maximize your chances of purchase.

The group buy

As described in the first chapter, the group buy is a typical choice for keyboard product sale. Here's a quick explanation of how it works:

- **Interest check:** In this phase, the product is initially designed and published for public feedback or publicity. Usually, you want to spot the product you want to buy while it is still in this phase. One common place to check is GeekHack's interest check board.
- **Group buy:** In this phase, the product begins transition to reality.
 - First, the orders are collected and payments are received. This can be done in one of few ways:
 - *First-come first-serve:* The first people to put in their order get to join in.
 - *Raffle:* People eligible for purchase are chosen out of a pool of entries.
 - *Private buy:* These are usually not advertised to the public, so no need to worry about these. However, they do exist in private groups behind the scenes for very exclusive products.
 - Then, the group buy sells out or the ordering period ends, and the GB moves to production phase.
 - The products are produced to order.
 - The products are shipped to the buyers.
- **Post-GB:** One of few things can happen.
 - *Round $n+1$:* Another round of sales can occur if the product is in high demand and the runners wish to sell the product again. This usually occurs with a significant time gap between rounds.

- *Extras sale*: Leftover units from the group buy produced as potential replacement units may be put on sale.
- *Nothing at all*: The group buy may be over permanently, with no more plans of sale in the future.

Do note that there is plenty of chance for a group buy to fail if the production fails in one way or another. In addition, the group buy runner may run off with the money. Always double-check that you are buying from a reputable vendor or group buy runner.

The aftermarket warning

As explained in the first section, the aftermarket is a very active place for resale of both new and used products.

This may be beneficial if trying to purchase a past group buy product; however, be aware that the aftermarket is a very dangerous place:

- Flippers and resellers oft sell brand new units for multiple times higher price than MSRP. You may end up overpaying significantly for a product if buying from such people.
- Scammers oft take advantage of the aftermarket to either steal boards or money from unsuspecting traders.

When dealing with the aftermarket, proceed at your own risk.

The closing words

Yes, you made it all the way through. Info that usually takes months to scrape together, all consumed in significantly less time.

Before you go, a few tidbits that will help along the journey:

It's a hobby after all

Don't despair if you don't make it into a group buy. There is always something better around the corner, and after all, it's just a rectangle with buttons. Take it lightheartedly.

Read, read, read

In this hobby, knowledge is power. Being in the know leads to better keyboards built, and more satisfaction for yourself.

There is a wealth of information everywhere. Take full advantage of it, but at the same time know how to pick between quality and unreliable info.

The power of testing

No matter how much you read descriptions, watch typing tests, and inspect force curves, nothing compares to trying the real thing. Visit keyboard events when possible, try various options, and build up your personal preferences.

And with that said, welcome to the world of custom keyboards. I wish you the best along the journey, and await the words you will type into this world.

Sincerely,
ai03

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