

# Roland Jupiter-50

## £2,000

Hot on the heels of the flagship Jupiter-80 comes its leaner little brother. How does it compare? **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** finds out...

### INCLUDES AUDIO

#### WHAT IS IT?

A carefully stripped down Jupiter-80 for a lower price point

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#### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Very portable
- 2 Retains lots of the JP-80's functionality
- 3 Sounds as good as the bigger JP-80

**I**t's not been long since I reviewed the Jupiter-80, concluding that in the main it sounded fantastic, though its bare bones,

screen-centric interface let it down.

Well, since then Roland have been back in the lab and created the Jupiter-50, essentially a stripped down JP-80.

So are we in line for an improved screen and more hardware controls? Not so fast. The first thing you'll notice is that the JP-80's large colour touchscreen has been replaced with a smaller mono screen. Given that the touchscreen in the JP-80 was the reason why Roland felt they were able to shirk realtime hardware knobs, the '50 is even worse off as – once again – this is one powerful synth with so much going on under the hood in the way of parameters that the screen can easily become overloaded with information. And now the lack of colour doesn't help.

There are only two assignable real-time dials, the S1 and S2 switch, three part sliders, the bender/mod stick and the D-Beam, which sounds a lot but in practice it could do with a lot more. Thankfully, the 'tone blender'

function from the '80 is retained which allows multiple parameter control from the C1 or C2 dial.

#### Hands-on

I'm not quite sure why Roland have such an aversion to multiple real-time controllers, especially as the original Jupiters were so well adorned, but I hope they head more in the direction of the slider-laden JD-800 (and even last

year's excellent screenless SH-01 Gaia) in the future. This is what customers want and a lot of the competition, such as Nord and Korg, know that hands-on means extra sales.

By way of an antidote instead, Roland have an iPad app (downloadable from Apple's App Store) on the way which will go a long way to making the JP-50 touchable. Clever? Certainly. Requiring the ownership of an iPad?

### Sound Test

There's little to complain about sound-wise, as the JP-50 uses the same 'Supernatural' unlooped samples as its bigger brother. Highlights include the acoustic and electric pianos, acoustic string, woodwinds and guitars and the Jupiter-8-style pads and leads. It's a very full and warm-sounding synth that can do extreme lows and highs with a

decent mid-range punch. The powerful arpeggiator, filters and effects also sound excellent. In particular the new analogue filter models (unofficially based on Moog, Sequential and Jupiter-8 and are in the Version 2 software) get right in the ballpark of the originals, though the filter and amp envelope response time could be

snappier for bass sounds. Behaviour modelling adds much to the acoustic sounds and the sympathetic piano resonance, acoustic guitar strums and slides, vibraphone and timpani rolls and string glissandos and swells all make for a rewarding experience. With a little pre-gig programming you'll soon get the best out of it.

#### USB Input

USB slot for storing and loading in sounds from a USB flash drive.

#### Real-time Control

Two real-time dials that can be assigned to various controller duties or the 'tone blender' function to control multiple parameters at once.

#### Sliders

Part sliders and switches for fading in and out or muting layers within a live set or registration. Very handy for live tweaks.

#### Manual Button

Easy access to a bare bones sound from which to start deeper programming.





You got it. Meanwhile back on the keyboard, the space where the real-time controllers should be is now the perfect place to place your 'Pad. And if you need to buy an iPad to get the most out of programming your '50 then the combined price is approaching that of the '80... Which – for a limited time – now comes with a free iPad 2... Still with us?... Let's just let it go, eh?

The '50 is markedly thinner than the bulky '80 with a keybed more like that on their excellent Juno Stage. Unfortunately that means that it's lacking the aftertouch of its big brother

### Close to the tone

Out the back we lose the XLR balanced outs and the digital out of the '80 but the sub outs are retained along with USB, MIDI ports (no Thru) and stereo audio in. The two control pedal connections and sustain are still present and the switchgear feels largely the same quality as the JP-80, though the side panels are now silver-painted brushed metal panels on the '80. One upside to this is that 7kg (almost 15lb) has been shaved off the weight of the JP-80, making this a very lightweight

to four tones (acoustic or synth) can be layered to form a 'live set' (which includes envelopes, filters, offsets, panning and more) and one live set (two on the JP-80) can be used in what's called a 'registration'. This registration contains a snapshot of performance-related settings such as splits, layers, note ranges, arpeggiator settings, pedal control assignments and more, plus it includes an upper part, combined lower/percussion part and a solo part, each of which has a dedicated front panel volume slider and on/off switch, so that parts and layers can be quickly muted

or faded in or out, which is great for live performance.

The dedicated coloured sound category buttons massively aid the sound selection process but I do

miss the under-panel registration buttons on the JP-80, though the '50 still has four on the main panel.

A very handy feature that's debuted on the JP-50 (and that's made its way to the JP-80 with the free Version 2 software) is the manual/single play mode which immediately switches the JP-50 to a single upper part, from which you can quickly build new sounds. This really simplifies programming a lot. Unfortunately, the drawbar organ still doesn't have a dedicated B3-style chorus (as I noted in the JP-80 review) and though drawbars appear on the screen now you can't touch and drag them...

## A rumoured-to-be-free iPad app will go a long way to making the JP50 synth programming more hands-on

and while many other boards at this price are similarly strapped, the JP-50 really misses it, especially when you consider how expressive the Supernatural and behaviour-modelled sounds can be (and how much the feature was all over the complex sounds of the JP-80). At least the 76-note keybed is almost indistinguishable in feel when put next to the JP-80 – it's super high quality and fast to play yet controllable. How about a weighted version of the JP-50 or '80 for those that want to get more out of the superb onboard pianos and EPs? Oh, and a 61-note cheaper version and rack module would be nice too!

board – so much so that you can easily manage it yourself under one arm in a soft case, or in a lightweight plastic hard case. Given that Roland sold the '80 as the perfect live 'board this is certainly a step in the right direction. Do watch out though if you have a small car as the JP-50 is actually a little bit longer than the JP80 at 1,268mm.

### Sound it out

So what does it sound like? Let's quickly outline the sound structure as there's a bit of a learning curve here. The main element in a JP-50 sound is a 'tone', which can be a 'Supernatural Acoustic' or a 'Supernatural Synth'. Up

### SPECS

#### Keyboard

76 keys semi-weighted (with velocity)

#### Sound Generator

**Maximum Polyphony:**

128 voices

**Parts:** 3 (Upper, Solo, Percussion/Lower)

**Registrations:** 128

**Live Sets:** 2

#### Effects

**Multi-Effects (MXF):**

4 units, 76 types

**Reverb:** 1 unit, 5 types  
Multi-Effects can be used only with a Live Set.

#### USB Memory Song Player/Recorder Section

1 stereo track

**Playable File Format Audio File:** WAV, AIFF, MP3

**Recording File Format Audio File:** WAV (44.1kHz,

16-bit Linear, stereo)

#### Arpeggiator

**Preset:** 128 styles

**User:** 16 styles

**Harmony Intelligence:** 17 types

#### Controllers

D-Beam, Pitch Bend/Modulation Lever, Assignable buttons (S1, S2), Assignable knobs (Cutoff/C1, Resonance/C2), Part Level sliders (Perc/Lower, Upper, Solo)

#### I/Os

Phones Jack (Stereo 1/4-Inch Phone Type), Main Out Jacks (L/Mono, R) (1/4-Inch Trs Phone Type), Sub Out Jacks (L, R) (1/4-Inch Phone Type), Audio In Jack (Stereo Miniature Phone Type), Foot Pedal Jacks (Ctrl 1, Ctrl 2, Hold), MIDI Connectors (In, Out), USB Computer Port (Audio/MIDI), USB Memory Port

#### Dimensions:

1,268 x 361 x 117mm

#### Weight

11kg





## ALTERNATIVES



### Nord Electro 4D

£1,649

Upcoming new Nord Electro. Lightweight and compact with great organ, acoustic and electric piano tones, plus you can load in your own samples.

[www.nordkeyboards.com](http://www.nordkeyboards.com)



### Korg M3-61 XPanded

£1,699

Powerful workstation with a vast array of acoustic and synth sounds onboard plus sequencing, sampling, powerful effects and plenty of real-time control.

[www.korg.co.uk](http://www.korg.co.uk)



### Yamaha MOX8

£1,345

Cut-down Yamaha Motif XS. One of the lightest 88-note weighted boards available with versatile sound set, effects and sequencer.

<http://uk.yamaha.com>

I can't really quibble with any of the sounds that the JP-50 can produce and the new serial effects routing mode helps open up more sonic possibilities. However, be aware that there are only

staple sounds admirably (particularly if you're a Sonar user as the JP-50 becomes a perfect front end for the included Sonar LE software). Film composers should love it as its

the best sounding synths available. This is a very important point as the sound quality is one of the most redeeming features of the new Jupiter series and it kind of makes up for the bare interface.

For live performers the iPad editor puts back the missing controls, screen and more, and if you can live without aftertouch and the halved polyphony then

## Interface gripes aside, the JP-50's real appeal is as a workhorse instrument that covers all bases

four effects units, compared to the JP80's eight, plus no dedicated solo/percussion part effects and no mastering effects either. That said they do sound great and are very tweakable.

### 50-50

Interface gripes aside, the JP-50's real appeal is as a workhorse studio instrument that can cover all your

expressive acoustic sounds can be breathtakingly realistic while electronic producers love its extremely powerful synth section, particularly with the new analogue modelled filter types on board.

One of the smartest things Roland have done is keeping the great-sounding D/A converters found in the JP-80 and so the '50 sounds every bit as wide, smooth and punchy. It's easily one of

definitely consider the JP-50 based for sound quality, scope and portability. Shame the '50 couldn't be cheaper but then we wish that about everything! Need the extra notes, keys and screen? Go for the '80. Need to save a little money and weight, then it's the '50. **FM**

## Comparing the Sound Engine

The JP-50's polyphony has been halved from 256 notes (on the JP-80) to 128 notes, which is still decent but perhaps a little restrictive, especially when you consider how much stacking power is

available under the hood. As a result I noticed occasional note stealing in complex multi-layered patches, though for the majority of sounds it's not a problem. Also, there are now three parts

per registration (Perc/Lower, Upper and Solo) compared to the four parts on the JP-80. This isn't such a big deal in practice but bear in mind it means less complex splits and layers.

FutureMusic	VERDICT: DELAY
BUILD	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
VALUE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
EASE OF USE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
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RESULTS	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
Cheaper and more portable than the '80 if you don't need its keyboard, polyphony or touchscreen.	



### New Screen

Out with the touch, in with the mono-chrome. The new screen cuts back on the '80's control.

### Colour-coded

Coloured category select buttons for quickly finding favourite sounds.