



Roland Juno-DS88

£779

The latest 88-note Juno model offers a lot for a pretty modest outlay. How does it fair? Dan 'JD73' Goldman investigates...

CONTACT WHO: Roland UK TEL: 01792 702701 WEB: www.roland.co.uk **KEY FEATURES** i/o: 88-note 'Ivory G' weighted keyboard, 128-note polyphony, 16 parts, over 1,200 presets/256 user patches, splitting/layering, wave memory expansion, sample import, battery powerable, 80 multi-effects plus chorus and reverb units, mic/audio inputs, onboard rhythms, pattern sequencer and arpeggiator **DIMENSIONS:** 141.5 x 34.1 x 14.4cm **WEIGHT:** 16.2kg

THE PROS & CONS



A lot of useful features for a very reasonable price

A great-feeling weighted keyboard, with textured non-slip 'Ivory G' keys

A wide range of decent sounds, plus you can pull in your own samples/audio



The screen can feel cramped during deeper editing. Currently no specific Juno-DS Editor

No combo XLR socket for mics – you need an XLR to jack lead for vocoding/AutoPitch duties

The filters aren't as smooth as on higher-end Roland digital synths



mod/bender and four sliders with four control dials that feel sturdy, plus the tough plastic selector switches and backlit rubber pads feel reassuring too. Though there's plenty of plastic in use on the control panel, it doesn't feel cheap and the MDF chassis adds strength to avoid flexing, plus there's a matte-black metal panel across the front (under the keys) to add further rigidity. With the main control centre residing in the middle of the wide front panel, there's also some handy spare real estate either side for placing an iPad or small laptop. The surface is smooth throughout but add a couple of velcro strips/rubber grip-mat for securing your device and voila!

Take control

The control panel is cleanly designed and generally intuitive with functionality grouped neatly into logical sections. First up is a Mode section that deals with sample import functionality for user samples (a feature that is very welcome indeed, allowing you to use 16-bit 44.1 WAVs for sound creation/triggering) followed by a DAW control button that puts the DS88 into MIDI control mode, allowing you to control

DAWs (Logic, Cubase, Sonar etc) directly from the DS88's panel. This is great if you want to use the DS88 as the centrepiece of your DAW-centric studio. Unusually for such a big board, the DS88 can also be powered by eight AA batteries, which is handy for busking in particular.

Section 2 on the front panel contains four knobs and four sliders and in DAW mode these can be mapped to any MIDI CC of your choice (for using with plug-ins etc). In normal operating mode, they take on various roles depending on the function selected. For example, you can affect filter cutoff and resonance and the amp's attack and release rates, plus mic reverb and chorus/delay/reverb levels, all with direct control. In addition, the four knobs can be assigned to other functions of your choosing (EQ or FX for example) and you can store 16 sets of controller assignments (like scenes on a Yamaha board). The sliders are also used for controlling levels of the parts in section 3 of the panel and the phrase pads transmit velocity and can be assigned MIDI duties.

Section 3 deals with keyboard options, so you'll find a button for keyboard split (one patch left and

The modern Juno range has always been about offering a strong set of features and solid sounds for a reasonable price and the 61 and 88-note DS models are the latest models built with this ethos in mind.

Weighing in at 35lbs, the Juno-DS88 is pretty lightweight as far as weighted boards go (the Nord Stage 2 EX 88 which is currently one of the lighter 88-note boards is 5lbs heavier) so for players who demand a

quality weighted action but don't want their backs to break when transporting, the Juno-DS88 is immediately a serious contender!

The 88-note 'Ivory G' keyboard is superb – it's almost perfectly balanced, not too stiff and responds well across its range. I found the standard velocity curve too deep for my lighter playing style/touch, so I opted for the 'light' curve which allowed me to extract more dynamic range from all the sounds onboard.

Build quality-wise, the DS88 is solid. There's the tried and tested

THE ALTERNATIVES



Yamaha MOXF8 £1,201

Features an 88-note weighted keyboard, Motif-based soundset and flash memory for importing Yamaha's own, or third-party sound libraries. Also features plenty of effects, a powerful sequencer and DAW integration.

www.yamahasynth.com



Korg Kross 88 £785

Featuring lots of bread and butter sounds, 16-track sequencer, audio recorder, plenty of effects and an 88-note weighted keyboard, the Kross is Korg's entry level workstation.

www.korg.com



Kurzweil SP5-8 £849

Taking sounds from Kurzweil's well-respected PC-3 series, the SP5-8 also offers an 88-note weighted keyboard, 861 presets, powerful effects, 16-part multi-timbrality and five real-time sliders.

www.kurzweil.com



KEYBOARD The 88-note weighted keyboard has a surprisingly expensive feel, helped by the textured surface and nicely balanced weight.

EFFECTS With the reverbs, amp sims, flangers, auto-panning, distortions, rotary effects and more, you can subtly effect things or destroy sounds!

PADS Use for MIDI, triggering audio files from an attached USB stick, triggering/muting the components of a rhythm pattern, and more.

SEQUENCER A simple yet effective backing machine and writing tool and you can play/sing/vocode along on top of any pattern/sequence.

one right of a user-definable split point), a Dual switch that stacks two sounds, and 'Super Layer' that allows you to stack a single patch up to five times and then detune each patch for creating bigger sounds. There's also a nicely spec'd MIDI-syncable arpeggiator with 128 preset styles, (each with 12 motifs) for adding interest to your patch or performance.

In terms of sound structure, there are two main modes: Patch and Performance. Patch mode deals with a single sound made up of four 'tones' (each tone can use any two of the 2,400+ onboard PCM waves) and Performance mode is a 16-part multi-timbral mode for using with the split and dual modes, with external sequencers/DAWs and when using the onboard 8-track pattern

sequencer for rhythms/sequences. It's certainly very well-featured and that's before you touch the deeper editing features!

Talking of which, the beauty of the DS88 is that, while it presents itself as a lower-level board, it's actually a very deep machine that borrows ideas/functions from more expensive Roland synth products. There's plenty in the way of sound-shaping onboard including several familiar filter types (though there's some audible stepping), plus two LFOs and a 'step' LFO per-patch and a really interesting TMT mode that allows cross-modulation of tones in various ways (including velocity-triggering of tones within a patch). There's also basic FM onboard (FXM) and then, to put the icing on the cake, you have 80 solid-sounding/versatile effects, plus AutoPitch (which corrects your voice like Auto-Tune) and a very decent vocoder too (though unfortunately there's no combo jack/XLR socket).

All things considered, the Juno-DS88 offers a lot of punch for your pound! It covers a helluva-lot of sonic territory in a pretty intuitive way, with surprisingly solid-sounding results. For just £779 street, it's therefore a bit of a steal! **FM**

SOUNDS, PATTERN SEQUENCER AND MORE...

Each major sound type is neatly categorised; simply press any of the under-screen category buttons to access the plethora of onboard sounds. There are great drum kits/samples, very playable acoustic/electric pianos, good quality strings, guitars, basses and clavichords, some okay organs, useful world/ethnic sounds and more sounds/waves can be downloaded from Roland's Axial library/website. The quality is generally very good throughout. This is further enhanced by the 8-measure pattern sequencer which allows 8-track MIDI recording (for capturing ideas quickly), the rhythm/backing machine (where the pads act as eight variations/fills) and the audio player that allows audio (WAV) playback via USB stick. Like many current Roland products, the DS88 also works as a handy USB audio/MIDI interface too.



FM VERDICT

8.5

Well-built with a playable weighted action, its sound engine can be deeply edited and covers a lot of territory. Worth a serious look!