

Roland Boutique JP-08 | £299

An ACB Jupiter-8 desktop module for £299? That's worth a serious look! **Dan JD73 Goldman** investigates

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WHAT IS IT?

Roland's own recreation of their Jupiter-8, using ACB technology in a 4-voice, compact module format

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Compact, portable, well built and nicely priced!
- 2 Retains the majority of the Jupiter-8's functionality (though 4-voice, not 8)
- 3 Gets right in the ballpark of a Jupiter-8, vibe-wise

Originally launched in 1981, the Jupiter-8 was the pinnacle of analogue/digital technology at the time and was adopted by key players and artists, including Nick Rhodes (Duran Duran), Howard Jones, Michael Boddicker (the JP-8 was used for those huge chords on the intro to MJ's *Thriller*). Players loved the JP-8's polyphony, performance controls and stunning VCO sound but also, it was a well-built, well-engineered

and well-featured, largely reliable board that also happened to look fresh.

With the launch of the JD-XA last year, we saw Roland's first analogue poly for many years (it's actually a hybrid as it has a digital engine too) and it's one fine sounding synth with that classy yet gritty Roland analogue character (DCO). Logically, Roland should simply box two of the JD-XA's 4-voice analogue boards into one unit to form a real analogue Jupiter-8-style

successor; but, while we wait for that (crossing everything!), Roland have thrown us a lifeline in the form of the limited edition Boutique range. The daddy of the three new Boutique models is the JP-08 which uses Roland's acclaimed ACB (Analogue Circuit Behaviour) modelling technology to emulate the original Jupiter-8's circuitry and the way those circuits interact/behave. ACB has enabled Roland to package their classic sound engines into cheaper, more reliable modern products and the recent TR-8 and System-1 have demonstrated just how close to the real deal ACB can get.

The first thing that strikes you when you see the JP-08 is how professional it looks and feels – it's a diminutive metal fronted, plastic box with sturdy feeling short throw, orange-lit sliders and solid dials. Longer sliders would be preferable but on the whole they work fine and it's good to have so much of the original's hands-on control in such a compact enclosure. Although it's harder to dial in more subtle values/sweet spots within



VCO Mod Section

Use this to modulate the oscillators via the LFO or an envelope. You can modulate the frequency of both oscillators independently or simultaneously.

Filters

There's a high-pass filter onboard, plus a resonant LPF with 12 and 24dB slopes. The 12dB filter lets through more highs, while the 24dB filter is darker sounding.

VCOs

The modelled VCOs sound full and can be cross-modulated for crazy or subtly detuned sounds and synchronised. Plenty of waveforms, and noise too.

Patch Number/ Patch Preset Buttons

Select individual sounds via Patch Number, or Dual sounds via the Patch Preset buttons. In Dual mode, Upper and Lower sounds are panned hard-left and right for unique textures.

just 1.5cm of slider travel, the sliders are fairly stiff, so you can be pretty accurate dialling things in as long as you move carefully.

One thing to note here is that the panel controls don't transmit or receive MIDI CC data like most modern synths (although Mod-Ribbon, Hold and Expression Pedal CCs are received/transmitted). The JP-08 transmits and receives using Sysex messages (which is infinitely more confusing to set up than CC data) just like the original Juno-106 and Alpha-Junos, so you'll need to make sure you work with a Sysex compatible DAW to send/transmit control data. This is a pain for studio integration, especially when most other synths today use CCs – at least there are



some controllers that can be set to send Sysex data (including Novation's popular SL Mk2 range).

As the unit is so compact, it fits nicely into a small rucksack, giving you a lot of sonic power to work with. On the move, on sessions or on stage this is a real bonus. However, there's a couple of notables! Firstly, there's no conventional

over two rows instead of one) but adds a sine on VCO1, extended footages on both modelled VCOs and a triangle wave and noise as mod options on the LFO. It does miss the extensive performance control section though, which brought out the best from the Jupiter-8's engine. This has been replaced with two touch

global modulation and to switch on/control portamento/other hidden functions in combination with pressing Manual). I would have preferred a

dedicated portamento control and two small/assignable panel mounted wheels, to make the panel more spaced out. The ribbons are also quite deeply set with a wide surrounding bevel, which makes them harder to perform accurately with. Also, there's seemingly no way to alter the depth of ribbon modulation independently or assign other functions to just the mod ribbon, so you'll likely prefer controlling the JP-08 using a MIDI/Sysex enabled controller instead.

Selecting patches is done Jupiter-8 style, with eight preset buttons to the left (64 patches total) and eight patch presets (which contain upper/lower/dual

It gets right in the ballpark of the original Jupiter-8 and displays that smooth yet gritty character



Source Mixer

The Source Mix control is a blend control for both VCOs – to the left you get oscillator 1 only, to the right oscillator 2 and in the middle, a half/half mix.

Envelopes

The envelopes sound great for basses, leads and pads. Envelope 1 or 2 can affect the filter, Envelope 2 affects the VCA, while Envelope 1 affects PWM and Oscillator 1/2 frequency modulation.

Modulation And Sequencer

One of the most enticing aspects of the Jupiter-8 was its plethora of mod options. Performance section aside, these are still intact. You'll find an audio rate-capable LFO with delay and six waveshapes that imparts a growly distortion upon sounds when pushed to its limit. The beauty is the LFO can address several destinations at once in a flexible way, including the VCOs (LFO frequency modulation of just VCO1

or VCO2, or both together, plus PWM), the VCA with three levels of depth and the filters too.

VCO2 can also be used as a secondary LFO, and you can simultaneously use Cross Mod (VCO2 waveshape modulates VCO1's frequency) and envelope modulation for the filters and VCOs too, allowing more detailed modulation to be set up via the envelope 1/2 ADSRs. (Env 1's polarity is reversible).

Notes can be recorded into the 16-step/16-pattern monophonic sequencer via the mod ribbon or a MIDI keyboard (though sequences don't output MIDI). For variation, there's swing, seven 'play order' modes (random, odd/even etc) variable gate time, ties, plus MIDI-Clock synchronisation. Note that selecting a new pattern queues the new pattern until the currently playing pattern has ended.

SPECS

Engine: ACB (Analogue Circuit Behaviour)

Maximum polyphony: 4 voices

User memory: Patch Preset: 8 Patch: 64

Controllers: Volume knob, Ribbon controllers 1, 2

LFO: RATE, DELAY TIME, WAVEFORM (5 types)

VCO MOD

LFO MOD slider

ENV MOD slider

FREQ MOD select switch

PULSE WIDTH MOD slider

PULSE WIDTH MOD select switch

VCO-1: CROSS MOD slider

RANGE select knob, WAVEFORM select knob (6 waves)

VCO-2 Section: SYNC switch, RANGE select knob, FINE TUNE knob, WAVEFORM select knob (6 waves plus low frequency option)

MIXER Section: SOURCE MIX between Osc1 and 2.

HPF: CUTOFF, RES

VCF (Low-pass): CUTOFF slider, RESONANCE slider, SLOPE switch, LFO MOD slider, ENV MOD slider, ENV switch, KEY FOLLOW slider

SLOPE: 12dB or 24dB

VCA: LEVEL slider, LFO MOD depth switch (3 levels), KEY FOLLOW

ENV-1: ATTACK TIME slider, DECAY TIME slider, SUSTAIN LEVEL slider, RELEASE TIME slider, POLARITY switch

ENV-2 Section: ATTACK TIME slider, DECAY TIME slider, SUSTAIN LEVEL slider, RELEASE TIME slider, KEY FOLLOW switch

PATCH NUMBER 1–8 buttons

PATCH PRESET 1–8 buttons

MANUAL button

UPPER/LOWER button

DUAL button

Step sequencer: 16 steps, 16 patterns, Shuffle/Swing, 7 play order modes, Pattern queueing, MIDI-clock sync

I/Os: PHONES jack; Stereo minijack, OUTPUT jack; Stereo minijack, INPUT jack; Stereo minijack, MIDI (IN, OUT) DIN connectors, USB port; MicroB type (Audio/MIDI)

Battery Power: 4 X AA type

USB Buss power

Dimensions:

300 x 128 x 46mm

Weight:

970g

ALTERNATIVES



Korg Minilogue

£435

The Minilogue has already sold out in many places as it offers so much for the price. Real VCOs, lots of modulation facilities, sequencer, delay, 4-note poly and more!



Akai Timbre Wolf

£199.99

Akai's super-cheap 4-voice poly has four independent analogue monosynths that can run monophonically, in unison or in poly mode. Separate outs and a 32-step sequencer available per voice.



DSI Tetra

£528

The Tetra has been out a while but it's still a very powerful bit of kit with DSI's DCO-driven analogue 4-voice engine, four LFOs per voice, sub oscillators and sequencer.

www.davesmithinstruments.com

patches) to the right which all glow a pinky-orange. Type in the patch you want and off you go, though there's no patch naming so you need to remember numbers. The Patch Number/Patch Preset buttons also work in combination with the Manual and Dual buttons to

differences in terms of the sonic weight/width, especially in stacked modes such as unison and poly. Put simply, the JP-08 sounds more compact than the original as fewer voices/notes can be stacked. This is apparent in dual mode where the JP-08 hard pans a lower

gritty character in terms of its filters (HPF and 12/24dB LPF), modulation and waves. It excels at cross-modded/ sync sounds, evolving leads, bold brass patches and lush pwm-driven pads. The thing most lacking is the amount of 'air' around the sound and the unmistakable

width/sizzle/
movement that
you find with
real-analogue
VCOs/VCA/VCFs.
The JP-08 sounds
darker and less
lively, perhaps
partly due to the

Boutique's 24-bit, 44.1kHz engine – the System-1 runs at 96kHz and has a more 'open' sound to my ears.

However, it's still a strong machine (especially when paired with the K-25m keyboard) and captures the overall essence/mojo of the Jupiter-8 well, albeit with four voices. It's certainly whet my appetite for the 'bigger things' that must be in Roland's design lab right now and, whether the inevitable 8-voice synth that eventually drops is ACB-based or analogue, based on this, it'll surely sound great. **FM**

K-25m Keyboard And Connectivity

The JP-08 is designed to pair with Roland's own £75, K-25m controller. It's basically a metal housing with a velocity-sensitive two-octave mini-keyboard (good to play despite its size) and it allows you to slot in any of the Boutique modules and flip them up (Minimoog-style) or lock them flat for transporting/playing flat. The K-25m connects to the module via a ribbon/multi-pin connector which connects

snugly, though it's a little fiddly to align at first. Nonetheless, it's great being able to carry the module plus keyboard in a rucksack and the modules can be swapped out easily as you need. Note that there's no aftertouch via the K-25m and the JP-08 won't receive it over MIDI.

Now a bit more on the connectivity. The JP-08 (like all current Roland gear) has a built-in 2 in-2 out USB/Audio/MIDI

interface, so you can record directly to your DAW and simultaneously send/receive MIDI without other cabling, which is great. Next to the rear mounted volume dial are minijack connections for audio input/output/phones and full-sized MIDI In and Out connectors for connecting to other MIDI hardware – these can be used for poly-chaining several JP-08s together for a bigger sound.

VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



If you hanker after the character of the Jupiter-8 for a modest outlay, the JP-08 delivers the goods.

Touch Ribbons

One for pitchbend and one for modulation/function selecting/changing (also latchable), these ribbons replace standard pitch and mod wheels and can receive MIDI CCs too. Meters at the side show level.

LFO Section

An audio-rate capable LFO that can be sent to several destinations simultaneously including VCOs, VCF and VCA. At max speed it sounds great and can create killer overdriven effects.