



Joy revision

It's taken seven long years, but Chord has finally retired its phenomenal Mojo. **David Vivian** welcomes the sequel

Of all the quirky wordplays Chord Electronics has used in naming its products, Mojo – a portmanteau of 'mobile' and 'joy' – is undoubtedly the Quetest... sorry, cutest.

Launched in 2015, no one really knew if Chord's hunch that what the world really needed was a portable headphone amp/DAC that could channel 'studio quality' sound into the most demanding high-end headphones would catch on. Game changer is a term with a grand history of being bandied about in hi-fi circles, sometimes with little justification. But there can be no argument in attaching it to the Mojo which all but bewitched reviewers, sold like crazy and still has no sonic equal for the money.

Reflecting the thorough overhaul, the new Mojo – virtually the same dinky form factor, more coloured orbs (dinkier than before) – kicks off with some unique tech. Dubbed UHD DSP, it claims to be the world's first lossless digital signal processor, the upshot being able to EQ using 18 dB steps of adjustment over four frequency bands – lower bass, mid/bass, lower treble, high treble – with no loss of resolution. In other words: that's qualitative consequences. Given the

diversity of tonal characteristics between different headphone designs, this isn't just a novel inclusion but something of a godsend.

The proprietary tech's 'engine' is a 104-bit custom DSP core running at 705/768kHz supported by extensive internal noise shaping. Volume control has been improved, too, now split into two distinct ranges: low and high volume. And there's a new

Mojo 2 is every bit as immaculately built and finished as the original

four-stage crossfeed function, also DSP based, that seeks to emulate a two-channel speaker soundstage for a more 'out-of-head' experience.

Technical consultant Rob Watts has upgraded his WTA (Watts Transient Aligned) filter, now with 40,960 taps using 40 DSP cores while a revised noise-shaper claims to offer greater depth and detail perception. Further putting the bite on distortion and out-of-band noise is an improved version of the 4e Pulse Array DAC and doing away with coupling capacitors is said to achieve greater neutrality.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Chord Electronics Mojo 2

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Portable headphone amplifier/DAC

WEIGHT
185g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
83 x 23 x 62mm

FEATURES

- Digital inputs: coaxial; dual-data coaxial; optical; Micro-USB; USB-C
- Supports PCM to 768kHz and DSD256
- UHD DSP lossless EQ adjustment
- Compatibility with Poly streamer

DISTRIBUTOR
Chord Electronics

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The new USB-C port joins the existing optical, Micro USB and 3.5mm coaxial inputs



Addressing battery life is a new FPGA-based charging system that doesn't just quicken the process but does so without heating up the Mojo 2 nearly so much as its predecessor in the process. Chord claims overall capacity has been boosted by nine percent and that the battery now lasts more than eight hours. The company has also modified the Mojo's Intelligent Desktop Mode, securely preventing the battery from overcharging when connected to the mains for any length of time.

In Spinal Tap fashion, connectivity is one better, the increasingly *de rigueur* USB-C input joining the existing optical, Micro USB and 3.5mm coaxial (capable of supporting sample rates up to 768kHz in the unlikely event you feel the need to partner the Mojo 2 with Chord's million-tap M-Scaler via a dual-data cable). The new USB socket sits just below the coax, necessitating a small lip on the underside of the chassis to accommodate it. A tad awkward maybe, but it's needed to ensure compatibility with Chord's Poly (HFC 431) streamer/server module. As with the original Mojo there are two 3.5mm headphone jacks while the control interface consists of Chord's polychromatic, polycarbonate orbs. These are smaller and fiddlier than before because of the need for a



fourth assigned to menu duties, joining those controlling power on/off/sample rate and volume up/down. The light show routine is quite something to witness, but intuition doesn't count for much when faced with the multi-coloured protocols of the new menu orb so you'll need to keep the user manual handy – to begin with, at least.

Only fractionally longer than the original, Mojo 2 is just as immaculately built and finished, its bead-blasted aluminium casework finished with a pleasingly smooth and tactile black anodise. As before, it can be kept looking that way by keeping it in Chord's dedicated leather jacket accessory, a larger version of which houses Mojo 2/Poly, with the added benefit of keeping the two snugly locked together.

Sound quality

I remember Chord's Rob Watts telling me at the launch of the Poly that Mojo, despite its remarkable insight and temporal precision, had been voiced to sound warmer and more forgiving than Hugo and Hugo 2 (HFC 428) to spread the 'sweet spot' for a broader range of customers. I've

little doubt this inviting balance contributed much to its appeal and success. Straight out of the box, the way Mojo 2 sounds – crisper, cleaner, cooler, more open and incisive – can therefore seem a little 'off message'. Truth is, the message has changed and, because of the new tech on board, it can afford to. A Mojo-like

Regardless of what it's paired with, Mojo 2 raises the high bar set by its predecessor

warmth is easy enough to achieve through judicious juggling of the EQ parameters, but it's teamed with notably greater transparency and soundstage real estate, putting clarity, detail, separation and imaging front of house. Arguably, a very satisfactory '...cake and eat it' result and practical showcase for UHD DSP's power.

Mojo 2's refreshed sonic skillset and versatility suggest pushing standards in multiple roles. I try it with an HP Pavilion laptop, Apple iPad Mini, Samsung S10+ smartphone and, of course, Chord's own Poly streamer



HOW IT COMPARES

Given the world of portable headphone amp/DACs has yet to catch up with the original Mojo, it's hard to see how the opposition is in any shape to close the gap on Mojo 2. That said, iFi's stylish £400 xDSD – while not quite on level terms with Mojo 1 for sound quality – certainly has an extensive feature set, including MQA compatibility, and so represents an attractive option for Tidal users. It's also £50 cheaper than Mojo 2. For the ultimate portable headphone/DAC experience and standalone DAC duties, the Chord comfortably holds sway.

running the latest V3+ firmware. Headphones include Oppo's PM2 (HFC 402) wired planar magnetics and Sennheiser's wireless Momentum 3 (HFC 457). In each instance, Mojo 2 easily raises the high bar set by its predecessor. Finally, it takes the place of a Chord Hugo TT2 (HFC 468) DAC as part of a system comprising an Electrocompaniet ECI 80D (HFC 473) integrated amp and KEF R5 floorstander (HFC 460). No, not exactly a like-for-like substitute but only the sense of scale, bass power and dynamic freedom is diminished in a direct comparison, the rare talent for capturing the unvarnished core of 'performance' remaining undimmed. Quite a result considering the £3,546 price difference.

Yes, technically, Mojo 2 majors on resolution, solidity, transient accuracy, timing and imaging, yet whether listening wirelessly to a Tidal Master stream of Silk Sonic's latest single, *Love's Train* – via Poly and the Sennheiser Momentum – or to a fully-lit orchestral work like Stravinsky's *Rite Of Spring* on the large KEF floorstander in the main system, Mojo 2 beautifully gives overt analysis the swerve for a remarkably natural, musically lucid style of presentation, eschewing the manipulative emphasis favoured by some digital denizens for a believable sense of weighting, proportion and acoustic space.

Conclusion

In truth, Mojo 2 makes the brilliant original sound a little opaque, coloured and closed-in and that's remarkable enough. To listen to a superb recording like Eva Cassidy's *Songbird* with Mojo 2 is to experience complex textures, limpid transparency, strikingly believable stereo perspectives and previously unnoticed recorded details subtly unearthed. It is, more than ever, a mobile joy. Ignore it at your peril ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

LIKE: Everything we loved about Mojo heightened; lossless tone control

DISLIKE: Quirky, fiddly ergonomics

WE SAY: A tech-dense miniature marvel quite simply without equal

An extra glowing orb means you'll need to keep the manual handy

