Nintendo Switch 2 review: exactly good enough

The first Switch was such a hit that Nintendo decided not to mess with a good thing. Instead of releasing a successor that feels like a generational leap or a pivot in a new direction, it's following up the hugely successful original with the Switch 2 — a welcome upgrade that largely sticks to the formula. It looks about the same, works about the same, and plays most of the same games. It's the Switch, just better.

Nintendo's bet is that it doesn't have to wow people all over again, and so it made a sequel that's only as good as it needs to be. After spending a week with the new console, I've realized that good enough is exactly what the Switch needed.

A refined (and bigger) Nintendo Switch

Fundamentally, the concept of the Switch hasn't changed. It's still a tablet with a split controller stuck on either side, with a dock that connects to your television.

But the idea has been refined. The Switch 2 is much bigger, for one thing. It now has a 7.9-inch LCD panel, up from the original's 6.2 inches, making it great for playing text-heavy games. It also means the entire device has become larger as a result, now weighing in at a comparatively hefty 1.18 pounds with the controllers attached. The larger size hasn't bothered me, though your mileage may vary. My 12-year-old keeps stealing it to play *Pokémon* and hasn't complained. But she'll do anything for more screentime.

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Verge Score

$ 449

The Good

- Improved hardware and display
- Faster load times
- New social features
- It plays *Mario Kart*

The Bad

- Disappointing battery life
- Few first-party Switch 2 games at launch
- No standout feature

There are some other nice upgrades. Like the most recent OLED model of the original Switch, the Switch 2 has a kickstand that can prop the system up at a wide range of angles, and the updated version feels a little sturdier to me, making it great for playing in tabletop mode. It’s a huge improvement over the original Switch’s flimsy kickstand. The Switch 2 also adds a second USB-C port to the top of the console, which enables you to plug in a webcam for online play. It’s handy for attaching a charger or battery pack whichever way is most convenient, too.

What you get with that larger and heavier device is games that look and run better. The handheld’s screen has a 1920 x 1080 resolution, which supports HDR10 and VRR up to 120Hz. It’s bright and crisp, and games look a lot smoother thanks to the higher refresh rate. But I do miss the more vibrant OLED display of the most recent iteration of the original Switch,

which featured deeper blacks and more contrast-y images. The new screen is a huge leap from the original, but it isn’t an all-around improvement if you’ve been using the OLED for a while.

The story is different when connected to your TV: the Switch 2 can finally output at 4K, with support for HDR10. You’ll need to play supported games to really take advantage of this, but it’s immediately noticeable how much crisper everything from text to gameplay is. HDR promises to make games more vibrant, though there doesn’t seem to be a standout game to show this off just yet.

Games are bigger this generation, too. Nintendo has increased the internal storage size to 256GB, but you’ll need to be diligent with how you use it; *Cyberpunk 2077*, for example, takes up 59GB on its own. Expanding that storage means buying a new and relatively expensive microSD Express card; your old microSD cards won’t work.

More annoying is that the battery life is worse than the original Switch. Nintendo estimates between two and six and a half hours of gameplay on a single charge, and I found my device dying around the lower end of that spectrum, especially when playing more intensive games like *Cyberpunk*. That’s not a great sign for the future if the Switch 2 continues to get more demanding games.

Some of this owes to the fact that this is simply a much more capable console. It’s built around a new Nvidia chip, custom designed for the Switch 2, and offering modern features like DLSS and ray tracing. There’s more RAM. The internal storage is faster. This is why the Switch 2 is able to run a game as demanding as *Cyberpunk*; it’s also why the Switch 2’s battery might die after a short two-hour stint.

The Switch 2 also has slightly redesigned Joy-Con controllers. They're functionally mostly the same, but bigger and with a few small upgrades, like more subtle vibrations. They connect via magnets now, which are less fiddly than the previous rail design. Nintendo says that the joysticks have been redesigned, too, but they still aren't using anti-drift Hall effect sensors. That means there's a chance owners will once again be dealing with the dreaded Joy-Con drift that plagued the original Switch.

As similar as they are, the Joy-Con also introduces some of the truly new elements of the Switch 2.

To start, the right Joy-Con has an all-new button dedicated entirely to Nintendo's GameChat social features. Chatting with friends while playing games isn't a new concept, but Nintendo has finally made it not only a core but a relatively painless part of its user experience. You simply pull up the app, and you can see what friends are online and what they're playing.

For the most part, it works as advertised. It's easy to connect, voices come in clear through the Switch 2's built-in mic, and video looks fine over the USB camera from Nintendo, which is sold separately. (The Switch 2 also supports an unclear number of third-party webcams.) This is a huge upgrade over Nintendo's old way of doing things, where you needed to download a separate Nintendo Switch Online app onto your phone and use that secondary device to chat.

The one flaw I've noticed with the new system is that screensharing — in which, for instance, four people can share their gameplay in *Mario Kart World* while they race against each other — looks choppy and ugly, to the point that I stopped using it.

The redesigned Joy-Con controllers also introduce a new control option. By turning the Joy-Con on its side and placing it down on a flat surface, you're able to use it like a mouse.

Unfortunately, the Switch 2 doesn’t come with a next-gen version of *Mario Paint* to show all the mouse clicking possibilities, but I spent some time with the Switch 2 update of *Civilization VII* to test it out. And while it took some getting used to, I found the Switch 2’s mouse controls worked surprisingly well. This may not be as true in a twitchy first-person shooter where every millimeter matters, but for turn-based strategy, the mouse was a big improvement over a standard controller layout.

In a nice touch, using the mouse is seamless; you don’t choose the option from a menu, you simply turn the Joy-Con on its side, place it down, and it begins mouse mode. This makes it easy to swap between control options on the fly. You also don’t need to use the mouse on a completely flat surface like a table or desk. I was able to play *Civ* just fine moving the Joy-Con around on my thigh.

However, it wasn’t particularly comfortable to play that way for extended periods. So it’s hard to see it as something I’ll use often.

So yes, the Switch 2 is exactly what it sounds like hardware-wise: it takes a winning concept and improves on it in subtle ways, and mostly doesn’t mess with what already worked. None of the changes are a huge leap, nor are any of the issues dealbreakers.

A launch lineup that mixes old and new

Of course, the most important aspect of any system is its games. And the launch lineup for the Switch 2 is a combination of new titles that take advantage of the more powerful hardware and older games that have been updated and are noticeably better compared to the original Switch versions.

The best showcase for the console at launch is *Mario Kart World*. It expands upon its predecessor in ways that Nintendo says weren't possible on the original Switch. The game takes place in a large, connected open world and doubles the number of racers from 12 to 24. It's bigger, more ambitious, and more chaotic than any *Mario Kart* before it, and yet it also runs incredibly well on the Switch 2. It loads fast and the frame rate holds up, even when playing four-player split-screen, which introduces a frankly absurd number of explosions and crashes on your TV at any given moment.

Outside of that, though, the first-party lineup is surprisingly thin. An impressive-looking *Donkey Kong* game is coming, but it doesn't launch until July, so the only other Nintendo-made release is *Nintendo Switch 2 Welcome Tour*, an extremely drab collection of minigames and quizzes designed to teach you about the new console. It's a nice idea, but the $10 collection is missing the Nintendo charm that can even make folding cardboard into a fun experience.

That doesn't mean there isn't anything to play right now, though. There are just a few brand-new games. Many of the highlights of the Switch 2's launch lineup are games that already exist on other platforms, but were likely too technically demanding for the original Switch. These include the likes of *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Street Fighter 6*, and *Yakuza 0*, all of which look good, run smoothly, and load quickly. The new handheld is not as powerful as other current-generation consoles, let alone a high-end PC, but it's still pretty remarkable being able to take Night City with you wherever you go, and have it feel good to play, instead of just fine.

Two of my favorite launch games take advantage of one of the Switch 2's best features. Called GameShare, it lets you play select multiplayer games with anyone else nearby with a Switch

2 or original Switch, and it requires only one copy of the game. It's not perfect – the second player is essentially streaming the game, and so the visual quality can dip at times – but it is a very fun way to enjoy co-op games that require a lot of coordination. I used it to play through a chunk of *Split Fiction* with my wife, and a few hours of *Survival Kids* with my, uh, kids, and it was a great alternative to couch co-op. We simply sat near each other, barking orders on what needed to be done next.

While the core launch lineup may be lacking, there are a lot of games that have been updated in a significant way to support the Switch 2. Some of these are paid upgrades; I dropped $10 to be able to use those mouse controls in *Civ*, and it'll cost you the same to get a much smoother and faster-loading version of *Breath of the Wild* or *Tears of the Kingdom*. These titles don't look radically different, but they're obviously sharper and running smoother; the faster loading times in *Zelda* may be worth the price of the upgrade alone.

Many of the free upgrades are just as impressive. I've been especially struck by games I've already played for hundreds of hours – *Fortnite* and *No Man's Sky* – both of which struggled mightily on the original Switch. But on the Switch 2 they look like and play like, well, modern games.

Actually, my favorite launch games might be the oldest of all. One of the benefits for Nintendo Switch Online subscribers on the Switch 2 is the addition of GameCube games. To start, there are only three titles, but they're excellent ones: *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, *Soulcalibur II* (with Link as a playable fighter!), and *F-Zero GX*. It's not exactly impressive that a sci-fi racer from 2003 plays fast and smooth on a modern console, but it's still a nice bonus. And the GameCube has plenty of heavy hitters that will surely round out the service in the coming months. (*Mario Kart: Double Dash*, please.)

A new generation that feels much like the last

In 2017, there was nothing like the Nintendo Switch. At a time when dedicated handheld gaming devices had seemingly given way to smartphones, and the PS4 and Xbox One era was in full swing, here came Nintendo with an underpowered tablet that doubled as a home console in a way that was simple and intuitive. It proved to be such a success that it revitalized the company into a growing entertainment powerhouse.

But eight years later, there's a lot like the Nintendo Switch 2. The original spearheaded a resurgence in portable gaming thanks to the likes of Valve, Sony, and Xbox, and even upstarts like Panic and Analogue. The Switch 2 not only has to compete with its predecessor, but also a maturing market of modern handhelds.

The Switch 2 doesn't feel like the kind of generational leap typically associated with a new platform. When you put all of its features together — the larger display, more powerful internals, better social and sharing features, and more flexible control options — you are left with a device that is markedly better than its predecessor, but is still a step behind the latest PC handhelds in terms of pure horsepower and available games.

But even with real competition this time around, Nintendo is still operating largely in its own sphere. And it turns out good enough is more than good enough when you also have the biggest *Mario Kart* to date.

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