Top-end Roomba can now refill itself with water via furniture-sized dock

reader comments

67 with

- The Roomba Combo j9+.
- That spoiler on the back is the mop pad, but it’s not mopping right now.
- The mop pack automatically slides under the bottom of the robot, which looks like this.
- The front camera navigation.
- There’s an app.

IRobot has even more new robots to take a look at. This week it’s refreshing the top-of-the-line lineup with the Roomba Combo j9+, which comes in at $1,399. Just like Combo j7+, this is a vacuum with a mop pad mounted on a swing arm setup. In mop mode, the pad swings under the robot and drags across the floor. When it’s time to vacuum the carpet, rather than lifting the pad only a few millimeters and potentially dragging it across the carpet, the whole pad swings around to the top of the robot and looks like a racing spoiler. The upgrade to the j9+ involves a new dock that can refill the robot’s water tank and a “SmartScrub” feature that does a better job of mopping.

Most of the new features are enabled by the new dock. These vacuum docks unavoidably just keep growing in size as they get

more capable, and the j9+ combo dock is so big that iRobot's press images humorously suggest decorating the Combo j9+ base by putting a vase or some other knickknacks on top. The Combo j9+ dock is approaching the size of a small end table, so iRobot says it gave the dock a "wood-like top to double as a usable surface." It actually looks quite nice, with ribbing around the perimeter and a faux leather tag on the side as an opening handle. Grab the tab, and the front of the dock will swing open like a cabinet.

- The dock is so big it's like a small piece of furniture now.
- A closer look at the dock, which is doing its best end-table impersonation with a faux wood top.
- The door opens, showing storage for pads and bags, along with that white water tank and a dust drawer. In this orientation, you can also see the water fill port on the back of the robot, which isn't currently connected to anything.
- This is meant to show how the dock empties dirt and fills with water, but I don't think it can actually do both at the same time. The robot can empty dirt in one orientation, then has to pull out, spin around, and back in to fill with water.
- Inside the dock, dust emptying is the hole on the floor, toward the front of the dock, while the new water connector is against the back wall. The robot has to pull in front-first to connect to the dust port and back-first for water.
- Here's another shot of how you're supposed to decorate the giant dock.

Inside the door, you'll see handy storage bins for new mop pads and dock vacuum bags. In the main body of the dock, there's a white tank at the top that stores the cleaning liquid, and below that is a drawer for the dust bag. Altogether, this will suck dust out of the robot and refill it

with water, and iRobot says you'll get "60 days of dirt emptying and 30 days of liquid refill."

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The one critical missing feature is that the dock can't clean the mop pad, so you're not quite at maintenance-free mopping yet. The most advanced combo mop-bot out there is probably the RoboRock Q Revo, which has a dock that can clean the mop pads *and* has a dryer—after a job, a fancy hair dryer will blast away at the mop pads so they won't get smelly from mildew.

Roomba Combo j9+

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As far as we can tell, the robot must pull into the dock in two directions, depending on whether it wants to deal with dust or water. There is a single bin that holds dust and water, so the ports to access both parts of the bin are in the back of the robot. That's not how the ports on the dock are aligned, though—the water port is against the back wall of the dock, while the dust-emptying port is at the front. When the robot pulls in front first, the charging pads and dust emptying hole will align with the dock to power up and empty itself. To fill with water, the robot has to pull out of the dock, spin around, and then drive in back-first to hook up.

The new Roomba is a bit smarter, too. "Dirt Detective" and "SmartScrub" will try to detect how dirty an area is and go over it multiple times if needed. iRobot says the bot will now "learn from past cleaning missions to automatically prioritize dirtier rooms and adjust settings like suction, cleaning passes, and scrubbing;" it can also adjust its suction power. SmartScrub is meant to counter some of the more advanced mop-bots out there, like Q Revo, which spins its mop pads at 200 RPM like it's a floor buffer, resulting in maximum floor scrubbing. The j9+ Combo doesn't have anything like that, but

it can detect a dirty spot and go over it a few more times.

The Roomba Combo j9+ is up for pre-sale and will ship in October.

Listing image by iRobot

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