

Remix Mini won't replace your Roku, or your PC

The \$70 Android mini PC that bewitched Kickstarter is not without some flaws.



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I've heard more than a few times that [Android](#) is [destined](#) to [replace Windows](#) as the [pre-eminent](#) desktop operating system. As much as I want to believe them, the truth is that we're still years away from Android being robust enough for me to ditch my trusty home PC. That didn't stop me from wanting to take a look at [Remix Mini](#), the Android Mini PC that made such a splash on [Kickstarter](#) last year. After raising a whopping \$1.6 million over the course of its campaign, it clearly seemed worth a look.

Open the box and the first thing you'll see is the device itself, looking like a [Roku](#) that someone's taken a rolling pin to. Beneath the lid (which doubles as a capacitive on/off switch) you'll find a 1.2GHz quad-core A53 chip from [AllWinner](#) paired with 1GB/2GB RAM. There's also a microSD slot to complement the 8GB or 16GB of on-board storage. Otherwise, the only other points of interest are the HDMI-out socket, Ethernet jack and two USB 2.0 ports.

"It's possible to get Netflix working, but it's not very fun."

Rather than lazily cramming stock Android onto its hardware, the creator Jide made an effort to re-skin Lollipop into something a little more like a desktop. The result is RemixOS and, as much as I don't want to raise the hackles of everyone reading this, it's hard not to spot how... *familiar* it all looks. For instance, the taskbar and start button look as if they've been grabbed during a trolley-dash of Windows features. Same goes for the right-sided notification pane and settings window, which have been cribbed from OS X.

I wanted to try Remix Mini in two different contexts: as a slightly more hackable equivalent to a Roku and as a barebones PC. The former makes plenty of sense, thanks to the hardware's small size, low power and the fact that it runs skinned-but-mostly-untainted

Android. To me, it'd make sense to use this in place of my Roku 3 so that I could watch media on my living room TV without having to worry about content restrictions. As a Brit with an obsession for US TV, this enabled me to use Hola's free VPN to finish watching Netflix's one available season of *Saturday Night Live* before it began its [international crackdown](#).

As much as I would like to suggest to others that they do the same, I'm not sure that I can, because while it's possible to get Netflix and Amazon Video etc working, it's not very fun. Crunching full-screen video seemed to push the Remix to its limit, with dropping frames, misaligned audio and achingly-long wait times. That, I should add, was without the burden of a VPN, which only magnified the problem to mean that I was taking plenty of bathroom breaks to pass the time. By the time I was done, I was aching to go back to the more limited, but functional environment provided by the Roku. If you're looking for a home theater PC and already have the requisite Bluetooth controllers, you could probably make this work, but otherwise you're better off going elsewhere.

I also wanted to give the Remix Mini a go as a work machine, just to see if those same performance limitations made it useless as a PC. By comparison, it's alright -- so much so that I'd consider keeping one back as an emergency option should my PC and laptop choose to die at the same time. For instance, I was able to have a YouTube playlist pumping out tunes and podcasts in the background while using Slack and Engadget's web-based publishing console. I was able to bounce between Google Docs and Google Sheets without any lag or slowdown and the system took all of this in its stride.

"You're just using a keyboard and mouse to operate a smartphone."

Much as Jide wanted to make Android a desktop operating system, there's only so much about the OS you can disguise. The further from the home screen you go, the more apparent it is that Android is a mobile-first platform, and no amount of skinning can change that. You're just using a keyboard and mouse to operate what is, in effect, a

smartphone with an experience vastly more suited for touch. Remix Mini feels like trying to work on a developer console -- acceptable, but hardly ideal.

Then again, that doesn't mean I didn't enjoy using it, and for \$70, Remix Mini makes a great tinker toy for the weekend. It'd probably make a super-cheap first computer for a kid or, as I said before, a compelling backup should your main machine go down. Just don't go into the purchase thinking that the device will do any one thing well enough to replace whatever you're currently using.

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After training to be an Intellectual Property lawyer, Dan abandoned a promising career in financial services to sit at home and play with gadgets. He lives in Norwich with his wife, his books and far too many opinions on British TV comedy. One day, if he's very, very lucky, he'll live out his dream to become the Executive Producer of Doctor Who before retiring to Radio 4.

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