

**Moon Neo MiND | Music streamer | £1700**

# “An elegant, all-round musical performer”

**FOR** Fine balance; good sense of timing; musical performance

**AGAINST** No built-in DAC; no DSD support



Its moniker might evoke some Orwellian government department in charge of brainwashing the masses, rather than a class-leading hi-fi component, but despite its rather eerily menacing acronym, the Moon Neo MiND is nothing more sinister than a really good streamer.

It is worth noting that MiND actually stands for 'MOON intelligent Network Device'. Effectively this means it does everything you'd expect from a streamer - namely that it draws from all the music stored on your mobile devices and NAS drives, plus streaming services via its control app, to collate one whopping great music library accessible in one handy place.

Physically, the MiND seems happy enough in its role, quite content just to blend in to your hi-fi rack. The black chassis is rather featureless, apart from a pair of logos, a trio of control buttons and LEDs to indicate input selection - wi-fi or Bluetooth - and sampling rates on its facing edge, and a modest vent on its top.

**“As soon as you start listening to the MiND, you begin to appreciate just why Moon omitted a DAC in order to focus on its digital performance”**

There is considerably more to report round the back, with the headline news being its lack of analogue output. So if you're without a standalone DAC, or don't have one built into your amplifier, you'll have to factor that into your budget. To give you an idea of about the premium you'll really need to factor in, we tested our MiND unit with a Chord 2Qute (£995).

### Ironic errors

On a more positive note, there are AES/EBU, SPDIF and optical digital outputs, so compatibility with any outboard DAC shouldn't be a problem. Alongside these, through the back gate is where you'll find a power socket and switch, ethernet input, terminals for wi-fi and Bluetooth antennae

and SimLink connections for use with other equally enabled Moon components.

There's also a one-size-fits-all remote control in the box, which is useful for skipping tracks someone else has chosen when you've relinquished control of the iPad. But in any case, you'll probably be doing most of your interaction with the MiND via its designated control app.

This is usually the point of our review where we insert a line about how the app looks nice, but keeps losing connection, or that it opts to play Alanis Morissette when we typed in Schubert. Thankfully, the MiND app is without such teething problems - it is, however, a bit on the clunky side.

### Takes some getting used to

Moon says that the MiND has been “designed to allow a person with basic computer knowledge to take full command of a music library”. While that sentiment does essentially ring true, some functions - such as searching for artists on Tidal - take us through too many menus for it to be honestly described as intuitive.

We end up building a queue of songs, when all we want to do is press and play. It's the kind of thing you might eventually get used to, but we've tested plenty of control apps where 'getting used to' its basic functions just isn't necessary.

If all this is beginning to sound a tad negative, rest assured the caveats end here. Because as soon as you start to listen to the MiND, you stop caring that playing your next song might take a fraction of a second longer than it probably should. Instead, you will start to appreciate just why Moon omitted a DAC in order to focus on its digital performance.

In simple terms, the MiND doesn't sound like a typical streamer. It is almost entirely



No analogue output means you have to factor the cost of a DAC into the MiND

### KEY FEATURES



bluetooth



Control app



No analogue output



A featureless black chassis means the MiND will blend in to your hi-fi rack

free of those telltale deficiencies in timing and dynamics, instead performing with a level of musicality we've heard rarely, if before at all, in this price bracket.

We feed it Manchester Orchestra's *A Black Mile To The Surface*, and get the texture of Andy Hull's luscious, wavering vocal lines, set among harmonies painted with broad, bold strokes. The MiND renders voices with full body and detail, but more importantly with such a level of expression that the character of the songs are not lost, even when playing over Bluetooth or via a compressed stream.

### Watch this space

The natural delivery of vocals catches our attention, but, as the album livens up in terms of instrumentation, the MiND swings open its doors and shows us the amount of space available, and just how much of that space it is able to offer each instrument without losing composure or the overall sense of organisation.

Trade Manchester Orchestra for the New York Philharmonic as it performs Holst's *The Planets* under the guidance of Zubin Mehta, and that spaciousness is even better expressed: as arrangements grow, the MiND seems like an ever-expanding universe, finding the space to let each instrument breathe, never troubled in finding ample room for them to perform.

The complex piece also further exposes Moon's grasp of both large and small-scale



The remote is handy, but you'll probably use the control app more

"Fans of Moon's signature sound will be pleased with the tuning. Overall, it has that more laid-back temperament of many of its stable-mates"

dynamics, conquering the grand swells with energy to spare, just as it finds the dynamic insight to keep each line from losing dimension.

### Human performance

Fans of Moon's signature sound will also be pleased with the tuning here. There is no lack of punch, no sense that the Moon Neo MiND is short of intensity, but, overall, it has that more laid-back temperament of many of its stable-mates.

It's nothing really to do with the timing - the MiND does that well too - but it has a generally more relaxed character, siding towards a more human performance than the uptight and mechanical delivery of some competitors.

Offering the MiND Hot Chip's *In Our Heads*, for example, there remains all the precision of a tidily produced electronic album, dance beats snapping at the heels of the next track. But without the kind of clinical presentation that can so often leave us cold when listening to a streamer. Here, you get the full sense that this is a band of

human beings playing the album, not merely code punched into a computer with someone singing over the top.

Sonically, we can't criticise the MiND: it is a balanced, elegant and all-round truly musical performer. If you haven't already got a suitable DAC elsewhere in the chain, you'll need to factor in the cost of one. That would really make this a £2700 streamer (if used with a Chord 2Qute) all told.

But for a sound this natural coming from a streamer, even that would still be a bargain if you have the funds.

### WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

**VERDICT** The Moon Neo MiND delivers the kind of musical performance we rarely hear from streamers at this price