

Honor Magic V2 review: exquisite hardware let down by software

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Honor's Magic V2 is the best designed folding phone-tablet yet. It feels just like a regular phone when closed but then opens up like a book to reveal a large, plush screen. Launched in China last year, the Magic V2 has now made it to Europe but not at a price that could be considered affordable. At £1,700 (€2,000), it is placed between the Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 5 and OnePlus's slightly cheaper Open. However, it has one major advantage over the competition: slenderness. Honor has managed to slim down the hinge and body to effectively remove the bulk that has burdened folding phones until now. Its big and bright outside screen has slim bezels and curved sides, making it feel and work just like a normal Android when closed, and when the tablet is opened it is only 4.8mm thick – the same as a stack of six credit cards – which is incredible. The internal 7.92in screen is slightly bigger than rivals while being just as bright, smooth and great looking. The crease in the middle is a little more visible than that of the Open but easily blends into the background in use. The hinge is rated to last for at least 400,000 folds and can hold the phone open at a range of angles. But the hinge doesn't feel as firm as some rivals and the phone lacks any water or dust protection. Specifications Main screen: 7.92in (402ppi) 120Hz OLED flexible display Cover screen: 6.43in (404ppi) 120Hz OLED Processor: Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 RAM: 16GB Storage: 512GB Operating system: MagicOS 7.2 (Android 13) Camera: 50MP + 50MP ultrawide + 20MP 2.5x tele; 2x 16MP selfie Connectivity: 5G, dual sim + esim, USB-C, wifi 7, NFC, Bluetooth 5.3, GNSS Water resistance: none Dimensions folded: 156.7 x 74 x 10.1mm Dimensions unfolded: 156.7 x 145.4 x 4.8mm Weight: 237g Last year's top Android chip The Magic V2 has Qualcomm's top chip from 2023, the Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 – not the newer Gen 3 version that started to appear in phones last month. It still offers plenty of power for multitasking, gaming and anything else you might want to do with it, but isn't the very latest technology despite the high asking price. The battery lasts a long time. Actively using the two screens for well over six hours and 5G for three hours, the battery lasts up to 49 hours between charges, meaning a recharge every two days. Sustainability Honor does not provide an expected lifespan for the battery but it should last in excess of 500 full charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity. The phone is generally repairable by Honor. Full battery replacements cost £110 and folding screen replacements cost £737.80 out of warranty. The phone contains recycled plastic and Honor publishes a breakdown of its environmental impact and offers trade-in schemes. MagicOS 7.2 lacks polish Software is the Magic V2's biggest weakness. It ships with MagicOS 7.2 based on 2022's Android 13, not Android 14 as you should expect from a new device in 2024. Honor will only provide four years of Android updates and a total of five years of security updates from release, too, which is at least two full years short of the benchmark set by Google, Samsung and Apple.

MagicOS has some nice ideas, such as a mode to turn the phone into a digital desk clock when idle, but it is generally just a little rough around the edges compared with the best software experiences from competitors. It has advanced multitasking tools, including the ability to have up to four apps on screen: two in split-screen and two more in smaller free-floating pop-out windows. But if you tap on a notification for a message, such as an email or WhatsApp, the phone insists on opening the respective app in a mini floating window, not full screen. Sometimes that's handy; other times it's just irritating and there's no way to stop it. I never want Gmail to open like a chat app. The phone also comes with unwanted apps preinstalled, including Booking.com, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and WPS Office. They can all be uninstalled but this is a £1,700 phone and should not come with the kind of bloat you get on a budget device.

Camera The Magic V2 has three cameras on the back, one selfie camera on the front and one on the inside screen. Both selfie cameras are solid but bettered for photos by the main cameras, which can easily shoot selfies using the outside screen as a viewfinder. The main 50MP camera captures good photos in a range of lighting conditions, although it tends towards high saturation of colours while frequently brightening scenes and losing contrast, making them look a bit flat. The 50MP ultrawide does a good job in bright scenes, while the 20MP 2.5x telephoto generally produces solid images. It doesn't have much reach, though, particularly compared with the best competitors with double the optical magnification available. All three cameras struggle a little with lower light levels, losing fine detail and sharpness and becoming increasingly inconsistent at night. There is also a marked colour difference between the ultrawide and the other two cameras, which is disappointing at this price. None of these issues are deal breakers but Honor has some work to catch up with the best in the market.

Price The Honor Magic V2 costs £1,699.99 (€1,999.90). For comparison, the Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 5 costs £1,749, the Google Pixel Fold costs £1,749 and OnePlus Open costs £1,599.

Verdict The Honor Magic V2 is an exquisite piece of hardware with software that can't quite live up to expectations. The folder is so close to being a regular phone when folded that it's easy to forget a giant screen hides on the inside. But the software is just not as polished or capable as rivals, nor is it supported for long enough. The lack of a water-resistance rating puts doubts on durability, while camera performance is a little weak in some areas. None of these issues are outright deal breakers and many could be fixed with updates. But they are disappointing for a device of this price, particularly when cheaper rivals do better on these fronts.

Pros: super-slim and light phone and tablet in one, just like a normal phone when closed, great performance, very long battery life, great internal screen, good fingerprint scanner. **Cons:** no water resistance, very expensive, costly to repair, software not as refined as needed, short software support, older chips, camera performance lags top competitors.

• This article was amended on 19 February 2024. An earlier version said Honor would only provide three years of Android updates.