Low Tech High Impact Mod
by twitter.com/santhoshr, github.com/santhoshr

image 1

Pros:
1. Nice split view
2. Use existing keyboard
3. All modifiers and control keys closer to hands, that includes return, shift, alt, control, backspace
4. Plenty of unused keys to create shortcuts, switch new layers, etc. The keys include entire last row including space bar, 2 of each win, control, alt and shift keys, even cap-less keys can be used to launch shortcuts
Cons:
1. Needs KMonad or other keyboard layout manager to work
2. Learning curve that comes with new layout
3. On boot your Keyboard is back to regular layout
4. Moving one row above surprisingly I liked the wrist resting, it might be awkward for others
5. You might need better or additional key caps, likely to look ugly. Also due to nature of many keyboard types the whole layout may be impractical on many keyboards

How To:
1. Remove function keys, and move all keys one row above, creating a single column gap in between the alphabets
2. Leave last row as it is or as you want
3. Use entire 2nd row from bottom to place function keys in the order provided in reverse for thumb to rest nicely (check the image). From left most existing left shift key, next 2 keys will be right alt keys, next 2 keys will be space keys, next one is left control key, next one is left shift key, next 2 keys will be space keys again, next 2 keys will be right alt keys, for ref. check image 2
4. Sandwich Return key in between B and N
5. Sandwich Backspace in between G and H
You are done.
Remapping if it is done like the image 1 above:
1. Top row : Function keys, though keys are numbers
2. Bottom row : F1 - Left Control F2 - Left Shift F3 to F6 - Space F6 to F9 - Alt
3. Use Space bar to switch layer and convert Q-P second row to Numbers, shifting will also work to access symbols
4. Gaps in keyboard unused switches are both unintentional and to minimise clutter, for e.g. between T and Y, the gap is to identify edges, gaps in either side of space bar is to reduce clutter
5. Surprisingly the unused gaps can be used as launcher keys, I use these switch-only / no-caps keys to launch programs using utility like Clavier+, I use it to launch kmonad, close or minimise programs, etc

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image 2

But Why:
1. From India, I don't have access to most ergonomic, mechanical, 60 percent, 40 percent, DIY keyboards, importing is also too expensive due to import duty on top of overpriced keyboards
2. I have TVS Gold Mechanical keyboard and Cooler Master Novalogic TKL keyboard with hybrid topre keys, still I'm not happy with traditional layout, I wanted to try these 40 pc keyboard, where all your keys are closer, as well as those ergonomic keyboards like Ergodox
3. This Low Tech High Impact Mod ;-) is one way of realising experimental keyboad layout
4. The post is for people with similar situation, and will be happy if it helps others to experiment with regular keyboards to achieve ergonomic layout

About layout:
1. After experimenting with remapping like capslock to control or capslock to escape, and other mods, still felt something is missing
2. After this row upgrade mod, I tried, right space bar, left enter key with just, two keys either side for thumbs, but hard to remember enter and space to hit properly, tried many combinations like alt, return, space, control, etc
3. Also increased central column gap from one to two as well, since alphabets on the right side can be accommodated, but it did not increase productivity due to gap being wider and hard to hit central column with two modifiers
4. Finally came up with these after seeing x-bows keyboard, almost four keys at thumb rest to hit space bar, exactly like you do when you have full size space bar, the central mod layer with backspace, return, control and shift, brings all the important keys closer. Kudus to x-bows to get it right, haven't used x-bows by the way, but the design is almost too similar to regular keyboard even eliminating orthogonal design followed by many ergonomic and 40pc keyboards

Links:
1. For suggestions, to get basic kmonad configuration file, use my github link above
2. Get KMonad from https://github.com/david-janssen/kmonad