



Synology DS212j

**PC
PRO**
LABS WINNER

Fine performance and a seemingly never-ending array of talents combine with a superb interface. A perfect balance of price and performance

- 1 While the DS212j's chassis feels a little plasticky, it's attractive for a NAS
- 2 Hot-swap drive bays fall by the wayside, but drive installation isn't at all tricky

» **PRICE** Diskless, £133
(£160 inc VAT)
» **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com

Slotting in at the bottom of Synology's two-bay range of NAS devices, the humble DS212j cuts back on connectivity. There's no sign of USB 3, eSATA or hot-swappable drive bays. Instead, Synology delivers a high-performance NAS device at minimal cost.

With the diskless DS212j costing £160 inc VAT, you might wonder where all that cash is going – the plastic body gives little evidence of its cost. There are only two USB 2 ports, and a screwdriver is needed for drive installation.

LARGE-FILE SPEED 84MB/sec (read);
49.4MB/sec (write)

SMALL-FILE SPEED 6.2MB/sec (read);
10.3MB/sec (write)

That isn't tricky, however, and the rest of the installation is straightforward too. The Synology has a major advantage over its competitors in the shape of its DiskStation Manager (DSM) web interface. Synology has dispensed with the traditional menus – instead, the browser window is filled with something more akin to a Windows 7 desktop. Icons on the desktop give rapid access to major features, and a search box makes it easy to find features and help documentation. It's a multitasking UI, so multiple items can be open at once, and shortcuts for frequently used features added to the desktop.

The DSM applications are highly refined. The File Manager provides all the features you'd expect from Windows Explorer, but is also capable of unpacking or creating zip files or mounting ISO files as a virtual drive. Access the Synology's DSM UI remotely, however, and the File Manager

also makes uploading and downloading files easy. Drag files onto the File Manager window and they're automatically added to the upload queue. There's also secure HTTPS access.

The Android and iOS apps work well. DS Audio makes it easy to sift through a large music collection, and supports Apple's AirPlay for beaming music to compatible devices. It also transcodes more esoteric file formats – such as OGG, FLAC and APE – to a format the target device can understand. The downside is that the DS212j's modest CPU is only capable of transcoding to WAV, rather than MP3 like pricier Synology models, so remote streaming requires an ADSL connection with at least a 1.5Mbits/sec upload speed.

Performance is otherwise excellent. With two 1TB Seagate drives mirrored in a RAID1 array, large-file reads from the DS212j hit an impressive 84MB/sec, and

writing them reached 49.4MB/sec. Small-file performance was good, too, with 6.2MB/sec reads and 10.3MB/sec writes.

However, we found that we occasionally had to delve into our router's port-forwarding menus to get things working remotely. Compared with some of its rivals, this Synology kit can require a little more fiddling to get it working smoothly.

Novices might appreciate the simpler setup of the Western Digital My Book Live Duo, but the Synology has all-round class – it's fast, feature-packed and blessed with the best interface of any NAS on the market. And with an imminent DSM4 update on its way, promising a whole host of new cloud storage features, the DS212j is only going to improve.

OVERALL ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★