

HDHorizon Bollo NMP-MOB media Player

Advocate86



Media Players come in all shapes and sizes these days, but none have been truly portable until now. HDHorizon may have finally given the market exactly what has been sought after for some time, the first truly mobile media player package.



Based on a processor that we would normally expect to find in home cinema room players the Bollo NMP-MOB should be more than capable of handling full 1080p and from the line up of media containers that the manufacturer professes it can play, they could be onto a winner.

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Introduction

HDHorizon are no strangers to MPC Club and have in fact had a previous media player reviewed by us, the Bollo NMP-SE in April of this year.

At the time of carrying out that review I was informed that they were working on a new mobile player, but information at the time was very sketchy.

Recently we were contacted by John from HDHorizon who asked if we would be interested in reviewing their new mobile player.

Intrigued by the fact they were marketing this new player as mobile and also that their previous player was quirky in design, (check out the previous review), we accepted and have been bench testing the player for a few weeks now.

When the player arrived and I was surprised straight away by the presentation of the device, its dimensions, and the fact there may actually be credence to their marketing hype and description it was portable.

The Bollo NMP-MOB

The player arrived packaged in an ominous brown cardboard box (this should change to a proper carton for retail purchases).

On opening the box I found a zipped black padded



carrying case that holds the player, remote, power supply, leads and a small screwdriver. The size of the carrying case measures 170mm × 240mm × 52mm (W×L×D), and it has a carrying handle at the top which can be tucked inside if not needed. It looks like an oversized Filofax (yeah, remember them things), and it is well constructed with the feel of a quality product. On the top cover the words 'Bollo NMP-MOB' is embossed in black.

The package is well thought out and contains everything that you should need when out and about with your Bollo. In the case you have the following items:

Media Player
Remote Control
Power Supply
Power lead
Component breakout cable
Composite cable
USB cable
Small screwdriver

The only lead missing from the set is a HDMI cable which could have been included for that 'Just in case' scenario. All leads are gold plated and of a good quality. The case has different compartments and elastic straps to contain and hold everything for carriage.

The media player itself is constructed out of black aluminium. It has adequate vents on the bottom and sides which allow it to dissipate heat



adequately. It measures a dinky: $90\times150\times25$ mm (W×L×H) in size.



The top of the player has eight buttons, which allow you to control the player without the remote. They are quite functional as we will discover later in the review.



The Front Fascia and Top Panel

The front panel is sparse and has two small LEDs, one which indicates when the internal HDD (if fitted) is being accessed, and the other is the power light which stays constantly on. The power light is an amber colour which I believe would have been better as a cool blue LED to give it that bit of class. Next to the two LEDs is a mini USB slave input, this is used when filling the internal HDD and supplies enough power to drive the HDD

without having to utilise the external power supply. I have tested this and it works well when on my travels - which seem to be quite frequent these days. I also use the player as an external storage device for carrying around other files besides my media.

On the far right is a small hole which has a recessed IR which although recessed works extremely well.

The top panel as mentioned earlier allows the control of the player. The five buttons in a cross combination allow for scrolling around the menu with ease. The centre button of the five is the confirmation button whilst the outer four are the directional buttons. To the right of them are three additional buttons that are Stop, Root (home) - which brings you back to the home screen, and TV Mode - this allows you to select which mode the player should output its video in.



The Rear Panel

The rear panel features five I/Os ranging from USB Host port, HDMI 1.3a, Composite AV, Component breakout cable port, and a Digital Optical port.

The ports are well spaced out and labelled, but what is missing from the rear is an all important Ethernet port. HDHorizon have opted for no Ethernet port which for me is a mistake. The USB host port should have been incorporated on the side. Yeah, I know it's tight inside and YES it is

meant to be a mobile device, but it would have been the cheery on the icing to have had Ethernet connectivity as well. It would have meant that when you get home from your travels you could have used the player as your home media player as well. It is after all, more than capable.

As it is HDHorizon recommend several USB to Ethernet adapters that are supposed to offer up to gigabit speeds and cost around US\$10. I believe they will also sell you one as an optional extra. I was sent one with the player and it works well adding to the depth of the player, and making its absence as standard all the more felt.



The Internals

The player can take an internal 2.5" SATA HDD, which is easily installed by removing four small screws on the sides. The base of the player has two copper pins that the HDD is mounted onto after inserting it into the SATA port; this keeps it snugly in place and works well. However, because the HDD is mounted top side the top of the cover does become guite warm when the player has

been running for some time, just something to look out for when handling the player after watching your favourite movie in a dank and dirty flea pit of a hotel.....and we all know what movies will be watched there....??? I tend to watch Bambi or Lion King... \odot

On speaking with a representative of HDHorizon they have now released an optional cooling accessory for keeping the unit cool - although I have had mine running for days without any overheating issues. One point of advice would be to let the unit cool off before placing it back in its carrying bag - contained heat is bad for electronic components.



As mentioned earlier the unit is powered by a processor that we are used to seeing in a full sized media player, it has the Sigma SMP8635 on board. This chip is old nowadays and has now been superseded, but is still a damn good processor and fully capable of playing back Full 1080p HD content, audio or visual.



The player has no internal fan so runs quietly, though as mentioned earlier can get hot to touch.

Powering on and setup

As soon as the power lead is inserted the player jumps into life. The initial boot screen has the corporate logo and its Bollo branding.

After booting, which took approximately 30 seconds to load to the home screen, there are four icons which denote the four areas available to access. The background is a pale blue colour and the layout is slick and simple.



The four areas allow you access to the **Hard Disk** – access to the internal HDD, **USB** – if you have an external USB HDD or stick etc attached, **Network** – for when you have an external wireless or USB to Ethernet adapter plugged into the USB host port, and **Settings** – allows you access to configure your device.

Initially, as I always do when testing a new player, I headed straight for the **Settings** menu.

I downloaded the latest firmware from the HDHorizon web site (so far they have released four

new firmware updates), which fixes issues with subtitles, increased performance in UPnP, External USB HDD speeds and a list of added features like:

Added BD ISO file support
Added BDMV directory play function
Added Samba network protocol support
Added FLAC audio decode
Added the DTS-CD ripping files support

Seems like they are a busy team, check out their web site for a full list of fixes and improvements. Needless to say, an initial firmware update is a

must and the latest firmware at the time of going to print is 1.3.0.

The upgrade process was easy, the firmware bin file had to be copied to the root of a USB stick (this is the case with most manufacturers) and then by entering the Setting menu—

System Setting — Upgrade.

This then allows you to choose the location of your new firmware and after that the player does everything else.

The upgrade worked well and retained the settings that I had initially set for the player.

Once back at the Home screen, I again entered the **Settings** menu where I went about setting the player to just the way I like it.

The first screen in the **Settings** menu is the system settings page. From here you can set the Language, Upgrade the firmware, Restore back to the original firmware and it shows you what version of firmware you currently have installed.



Next up in the **Settings** menu is Audio/Visual Settings.



The **Audio/Video Settings** offers the usual list of settings expected from a media player.

I do feel however that HDHorizon need to change the feel of the menu system. At present when you select an area that you want to change, you highlight the field and push right on the remote control, unfortunately with this method you are not allowed to see the full list of options and have to keep pushing right until you know you have seen all of the options. This can be cumbersome. It would be easier to present a drop down menu from the highlighted field to allow you to choose from a list.

In the Video Output field there is the option to select 1080p/24, which is nice.

The **Network Settings** screen is basic and only really comes into play when you insert the USB to Ethernet or Wi-Fi adapter. It offers the choice of either setting Dynamic IP or Static. I tend to always go for Static as I like to know what my various appliances and devices are using around my house.



OK, back to the Home screen and taking it from the top.

The **Hard Disk** menu does what it says on the tin. It allows you to browse the contents of your internal HDD in an explorer fashion.

It also allows for thumbnail images of the movie cover to be displayed on the left hand side when you browse over the folder for the movie, (as long as you have placed a thumb.jpg 140x190 image in the respective folder.)







The menu screen is nice, slick and simplistic; do we really need over complicated menus? Do we need to know movie information in IMDB style? I would have to say, 'No'. Let's keep in mind what area of the market the player has been aimed at, and that is the mobile device market for the traveller, business person, or just staying at your friends for the weekend (and can't put up with the crap they have) type of market.

For this purpose the menu is just right. I even believe as a home media player the menu works well, all I really need to see is a simple pretty Icon and a thumbnail of the movie I intend to watch.

From the initial **Hard Disk** home screen is where you can browse your photos and play your music files also. This can also be done by browsing the explorer style initial menu. The only distinction

HD Horizon has between the various media genre is the folder names.

Entering the Music folder, you browse the list of your favourite foot tapping, head bopping CD folders and choose the track that you want to play. The manufacturer states that the player is capable of playing the following audio formats:

- WAV [.wav, .pcm]
- ADIF, ADTS [.aac]
- M4A [.m4a]
- ASF/WMA [.asf, .wma]
- FLAC [.flac]
- APE/CUE [.ape/.cue]
- MP3.

I tested all the formats and all appeared to work just fine. The only downside that I could see was that there was no facility to create playlists, or stack a few tunes in a row and allow them to be played. This is maybe something that HDHorizon may wish to develop in future firmwares.





Thumbnail images are still visible here as well, if you have copied a thumb.jpg file of the CD art to the directory.

The actual player is a bit basic, but is sufficient for the role that it is intent for. There are however weaknesses. The playback of all the formats I tried was good although I thought the APE format sounded a bit undefined compared to .wav, .mp3 etc. The DTS CD playback was very good and impressed me, but then again it was the first time I had experienced a DTS CD playback.



Let me just point out at this stage that the selection of music is not my own but what was supplied on the HDD from HDHorizon. ©

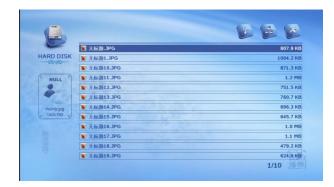
Unfortunately writing and reading Chinese is not one of my talents....maybe someday.

On the whole the Music area needs developing, although I like simplicity, I found it over simplistic. The plethora of different formats that the player can handle is very good and all formats that I tried played very well. The sound was defined and I could hear clear distinction between the different tonal ranges, this will however be lost if as I suspect the majority of users run playback on a stereo fitted panel.

The **Photo** browsing was a bit disappointing and could have been developed a bit more to allow for a preview window of the photo highlighted in the list - again this is something that HDHorizon may wish to develop.



The image on screen was clean, sharp and well defined. The colour depth was good and none of the images that I browsed appeared over saturated or washed out.







So next time a friend or relative invites you round to view their holiday snaps, go one further and upload yours to your Bollo NMP-MOB and bore the hell out of them as well. I always believe in giving as well as taking.

At least yours will come across better!!

The **USB** menu offers the ability to browse whatever USB device is plugged into the USB Host port. Access speeds are good and playing full 1080p media files from an external HDD is a breeze extending the players ability.

Lastly the **Network** icon from the Home screen allows you to browse your network and can give you access to UPnP and Samba shared shares and devices.

Even through the USB to Ethernet dongle I was able to playback full 1080p M2TS files with ease. (We will come onto playback in the next section.)



User Interface Conclusion

On the whole the UI has been well thought out and as mentioned is simple, slick and intuitive.

There is room for development however, the Music selection and playlist creation needs developing as it is quite simplistic and lets the player down in the Music playback department. The Photo browsing also needs a preview window to allow easy selection of images.

On the whole though I liked the UI, it is just right for a mobile device and with a bit of development would be good for a home media player as well.

Playback

Playback is the differentiating factor between a good player and a bad one.

It is pointless having an all singing all dancing device that can't do the basics which we expect from a media player.

As mentioned earlier the Bollo NMP-MOB is fitted with a Sigma SMP8635 processor, so I expected a lot from it. The same as what the DViCO 6500 or other equivalent media player can do. I expected a lot and hell it delivered!

The first thing that attracted me was the fact that the player could handle BD ISO and BD Folder playback. These were just some of the container formats that the player is capable of handling:

- ASF/WMV [.asf, .wmv]
- MOV/MP4 [.mov, .mp4]
- MPEG2PS [.ps]
- MPEG2TS [.ts, .m2ts]
- AVI [.avi, divx]
- MPG [.mpg, .mpe, .mpeg, .m2v, .vob, .vro, iso]
- Matroska (.mkv)
- BD ISO
- BD Folder Playback

I kicked off with testing the BD ISO and BD Folder elements. For some time now I have been waiting for a player that could handle these formats well, would this little player be the one?

I decided to stream the media across the network, which would be a good test for the USB to Ethernet dongle setup as well. As always my setup is a gigabit network feeding from a Windows 2003 fileserver, SmartStor NAS NS4600 fed into a managed Dell switch and off into my infrastructure. On this occasion I decided to use the component breakout cable for testing as this would test the quality of the breakout cable.



I browsed to my Ps3 BD ISO images, which I usually have to burn to a DD DVD and play back on the PS3.



I decided to test it with the Ronin 1080p BD ISO image - it has some very good car chases and is an excellent movie.



The movie streamed flawlessly across the network and played from the ISO without even a slight stutter. The chase sequences were as though the movie was playing of a standalone Blu-Ray player.



The colours were spot on; I had no tweaking to do with my panel setup. I could however, tell that I was using 1080i instead of 1080p. Such is the limitation of component over HDMI.

Still as far as there being any loss because of the use of a breakout cable, it was nil.



The colours were still true and unsaturated. I could see no 'jaggies' or stuttering on any of the fast action sequences.

After pulling myself away from the action, I decided to test the BD Folder playback. BD Folder playback is when you simply press play on the BDMV folder and the player will playback the largest .M2TS file in the folder which is usually the movie file. Trust me it saves a lot of hassle.

I took a different path from my usual test movies and decided to test a BD dump of the Beyonce Live Experience concert. Let's see how the diva performed.



Pressing play on the BDMV folder worked and it selected the correct file to play.



I was soon watching the Diva gyrate her hips and pout her lips, errhm... The sound was outputted into my Onkyo receiver via the Optical digital out and the inspiring tones of Beyonce were soon resonating throughout my living room.

The image quality was sharp, the blacks were black and the contrast was good.



It was time to test out the media player community container of choice MKV.

I moved across to the internal HDD and swapped the component lead for HDMI. This was to test the HD audio playback. I opted for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. The audio on this movie is in Cantonese and is True-HD; it also has encoded subs - another area that I needed to test.

The movie started fine and played well, the subs kicked in fine, however they need refining. The word spacing needs to be fixed as sometimes words are joined together. I feel that there also needs to be some form of differentiation between dialogue subs from one person and another, as it seems like the complete sentence is being spoken by one person.



Time Seeking worked well, though HD Horizon have gone for fast forwarding time seek rather than allowing the user to input a precise time. This proves to be tricky work when you are trying to go to a certain part in a movie.



The playback was smooth and I could see no frame drop at any stage during the movie. The zoom facility does not perform what we would expect it to do. During playback of a movie, the Zoom facility steps through the different aspect ratios, it will step from 16:9, 16:10 and 4:3.



I tested out various other formats like, AVI, Divx, ASF and MPEG 2, 4. They played fine and the SD quality files up-scaled well which was expected considering the processor that was being used.

Playback Conclusion

On the whole I was impressed at the playback quality of this small player. It held its own against the home media players and then some. The BD ISO played exceedingly well and in all formats there was depth to the picture. The colour was always within the defined boundaries that I am used to and required no tweaking of my panel or the player to correct saturation, contrast deficiency etc. The only downsides to the playback were the Subtitles - although they worked there is room for improvement and fixes, the Time Seek could do with changing as well to allow the user to input their own precise times instead of relying on luck to stop the forwarding in time.

Mobility

I thought that I would include this section as the player is marketed as being a mobile player.

I took the player with me on several occasions whilst working away from the home. I used it as a file storage device in the remote office that I was working from, it worked well and because I was able to power the drive from only the mini USB slave cable it meant that it was not cumbersome to setup.

I used it as a playback device for a week in my hotel room. Initially, I started off with composite, which is a big dislike of mine on the old CRT. Then when upgrading rooms to an executive suite, I used the component cable on the panel in the room. It always worked well and because everything was contained within the carrying case, I had the choice of output and it was easy to pack up each day before leaving the room.

As a mobile media player the device hits all the right notes and has definitely been designed well,

from the media player to the carrying bag and contents within.

The Remote

Considering its size, the remote works well. It measure approximately 150mm in length by 40mm in width.

It sits well in the hand and has enough functionality to be of use. All of the UI can be driven from the remote with ease. The responsiveness was good and I was able to operate it from a distance and at acute angles.



It is driven by a small CRT 2025 battery which should last long enough. The ON/OFF button actually turns the unit off and not just into standby, a bonus considering the player has no on board On/Off switch.

Conclusion

So how do I conclude on a device that offers so much and has such a small form factor?

As mentioned earlier as a mobile media player it is definitely a winner.

It does have its flaws, some of which can be rectified and will be, judging by the effort HD Horizon have shown in their firmware updates so far. Flaws like the subtitles, time seeking, over simplistic music player, lack of a preview window for browsing photos and system menu listings to allow the user to see the list of options available.

Flaws that cannot be rectified easily without a hardware review are the LEDs on the front of the player. Why amber when cool blue is the new black (remember where you heard that first ③) The main flaw to the player is the lack of an Ethernet port, this could have turned a mobile player into a multi-use player from on-the-go to in-the-home.

HDHorizon need to offer the USB to Ethernet dongle as part of the package and not charge customers extra for the dongle. Put it in the carrying case and give that extra I/O that should have been there in the first place.

The Bollo NMP-MOB has its strengths though, and they outweigh its flaws.

Its size and mobility is it major strength and the fact that it packs a punch, a BIG punch for such a small form factor media player.

It played everything I threw at it with ease and played them well! I like the fact that it could play BD ISO and BD Folder playback well, something that the new crop of players using the Realtek SOC are failing miserably to do so far.

The Price factor is just right as well considering the presentation of the package and the contents. Yeah, the Xtreamer is cheaper, but it doesn't offer the value that the Bollo offers.

HDHorizon need to listen to what is being said about the Bollo NMP-MOB. Include the Ethernet Dongle as standard, keep up the firmware developments and I am sure this small player will come out on top.

As a mobile media player I recommend it without hesitation.

Advocate86.

Details

Manufacturers Web site:

http://www.hdhorizon.com/en/product02.php

Price:

€149

Review Update

Just a quick update to the review, HD Horizon have sent me some pictures of the cooler that I mentioned in the review. It looks quite funky and should keep the player cool, what is questionable though is how much noise will the dual fans create.

Maybe I can talk our friends at HD Horizon to send me a sample so that I can report back in the forums.



