When an old laptop or smartphone is overkill for your DIY electronics project, a single-board computer is the perfect affordable alternative. It's been almost a decade since the first Raspberry Pi started a phenomenon and four years since Asus joined the party with its original Tinker Board. Now, a next-generation Tinker Board 2S has appeared to compete with today's more powerful options. It's pricey at $125, but it packs a lot of potential for sophisticated inventions and dedicated makers.

A Small But Mighty Foundation
If you're reading this, there's a good chance you're already familiar with single-board computers, and the Tinker Board 2S doesn't reinvent the wheel. About the size of a deck of cards—in fact, extremely similar in size and shape to the Raspberry Pi—the 2S (and the Tinker Board 2, which has just a microSD card slot for storage while the 2S has both a slot and 16GB of eMMC flash) fit a lot of functionality onto a small PCB.

The brain of the Tinker Board 2S is a 64-bit Rockchip RK3399 system-on-a-chip, consisting of a dual-core ARM Cortex-A72 running at 2.0GHz and a quad-core ARM Cortex-A53 running at 1.5GHz. This big.LITTLE design, as ARM calls it, allows the two CPUs to dynamically allocate tasks to the appropriate core for reduced energy usage. You also get a Mali-T860 MP4 GPU running at 800MHz and 2GB or 4GB of dual-channel LPDDR4 memory, depending on the model you choose. Our $125 test model comes with 2GB.

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