

the 2010 Hi-Fi+
AWARDS!

hi-fi+



DAC OF THE YEAR

Ayre QB-9

Reviewed in issue 72

The Ayre QB-9 takes the newly regenerated world of DACs and shakes it by the scruff of the neck. With only a USB input – meaning it is limited to being used with a computer in the listening room – rivals have criticised this DAC as something of a one-trick pony. Yeah... but what a trick!

It was one of the first DACs to feature the revolutionary Asynchronous USB input – which hands over digital data timing tasks to the DAC itself. This takes the USB feed from a PC or Mac without the need for driver software and presents it in good order to the QB-9's Burr Brown 24/192 Delta-Sigma DAC chip, a custom minimum-phase filter and to Ayre's either balanced or single-ended analog outputs.

The sound quality is revolutionary, as it helps remove that last layer of resistance felt by those who still cling to a 1980s model of how digital data should be handled. The QB-9 takes an age to run in and sounds much better balanced, but when it does, it "retains the typical Ayre sound; remarkably clean, very detailed, extremely musical and a tiny bit dry, especially at the top end." It also sounded "tidy, well-ordered, the sort of product you might tap your foot too."

We recognise that computer audio is not for everyone yet, but we felt that "even those who dismiss the QB-9 can't help respecting the sound it makes." As an excellent-sounding ambassador for the biggest change in music replay since CD, the Ayre QB-9 deserves the highest praise.

Price: £1,995

Manufacturer: Ayre Inc

URL: www.ayre.com

UK Distributor: Symmetry

URL: www.symmetry-systems.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)1727 865488

HIGHLY COMMENDED

HRT Streamer II+

Reviewed in issue 72

A USB-powered DAC might seem inexpensive in such vaulted competition, but this Asynchronous USB converter is high-end audio all the way. Fantastic value for money is guaranteed.

Price: £329

Manufacturer:

High Resolution Technologies

URL: www.highestech.com

Distributor: Audiofreaks Ltd

Tel: +44(0)20 8948 4153

URL: www.audiofreaks.co.uk

Naim DAC

Reviewed in issue 71

Very high-resolution upgradable converter that will charm Naim and non-Naim followers alike with its ordered and dynamic sound quality.

Price: £1,950

Manufactured by Naim Audio

URL: www.naim-audio.com

Tel: +44(0) 1722 426600

Weiss DAC2

Tested in issue 72

A pro, FireWire-supporting DAC that is as neutral – both in sound and to source – as the Switzerland it comes from. Bomb-proof build, too.

Price: £1,950

Manufacturer: Weiss Digital Audio

URL: www.weiss.ch

Distributor: Purite Audio

URL: www.puriteaudio.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)208 815 5878