

ARCAM rDAC £299

Cambridgeshire based Arcam were amongst the first to introduce a free standing DAC with the Black Box in 1987. They have now produced this small (160x111x40mm) but beautifully finished cast aluminium box called the rDAC as part of their Solo range. Although simple in looks, with the front displaying four LEDs for source selection, controlled by a button on the top, the internals are well specified with the digital conversion being carried out by a Wolfson 8741 IC. To overcome jitter problems associated with computer generated audio Arcam have licensed the Asynchronous USB Technology from high end manufacturers dCS.

In addition to this, a wireless version is available, the rDAC KW which connects to the rWave wireless USB dongle or rWand iPad/iPod dongle, which removes the need for locating the computer near the hi-fi.

Apart from the USB and wireless connections, both coaxial and optical S/PDIF sockets are provided, with power being supplied by a compact wall-wart. The analogue outputs are via a pair of RCA phono sockets.

SOUND QUALITY

Starting off with the Domingo piece, I found the sound to be quite lively with a definite shape to the recorded acoustic. The opening oboe and violins were very distinct, as was Domingo's voice, which I felt had a slight nasal quality in the upper midband. This slight forwardness helped to provide some definition as the lower strings and the harp joined in, but I was not entirely convinced that it was true to

his voice.

Putting on the Shankar piece proved that the lustre in the presentation was not necessarily a bad thing. The sitar produces what are probably amongst the more complex sounds, with the fundamental of a note being enhanced by a multitude of harmonising strings, each with their own harmonic structure. Played through this DAC the separation of the different strands of sound allowed an insight into the fingering of a man with true mastery over his instrument. The relationship between the sitar and the tabla was displayed almost as a conversation with the complex beat of the music, especially the speedy teental beat,

being both energising and easy to follow. As such it was a highly satisfying listen.

Rhythm again came to the fore when playing the Poppycocks tracks. I enjoyed the energy transmitted in the music, but felt that singer Miles's voice lacked a little lower end shape to be truly realistic.

The rDAC proved entertaining and involving to listen to, without ever descending into harshness, and this was especially apparent via USB where it rendered computer audio files with a panache that was unexpected at the price. Overall, considering its low cost and superb build and connectivity, it turned in a very good performance.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response measured flat from 2Hz to 20kHz our analysis shows, with just a small loss at high frequencies. This is hardly enough to affect tonal balance though, but the rDAC will not sound as easy in its balance as earlier Arcam DACs.

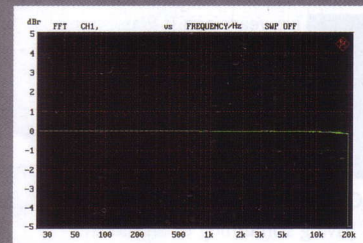
Distortion levels were low and very much like the other DACs. With a 16bit digital input distortion at -60dB measured 0.186%, very similar to the DACmini. Figures were a bit higher at upper levels, around -6dB, but the rDAC was within a whisker otherwise of its rivals in this group, showing just how convergent the technology is in stock form. The rDAC's distortion values were low all round, including at -60dB with a 24bit input, where we measured 0.025%, a very low value, if not quite the lowest possible.

Output was normal enough, close to Philips' standard at 2.2V and EIAJ Dynamic Range a good 101dB.

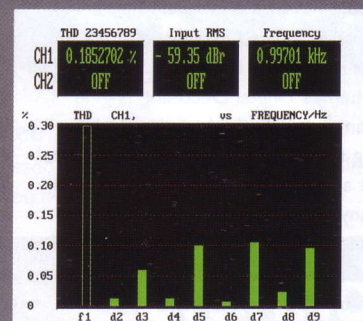
Arcam's rDAC turns out a good set of figures in every area and should have good sound quality. NK

-60dB	0.19
-80dB	4.6
Separation (1kHz)	118dB
Noise (IEC A)	-116dB
Dynamic range	101dB
Output	2.2V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



Frequency response (-1dB)	2Hz - 20kHz
Distortion	%
0dB	0.002
-6dB	0.001

VERDICT Beautifully presented and lively sounding DAC with the option of wireless connectivity.

ARCAM RDAC £299
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- FOR**
- vibrant sound
 - superb build and finish
 - asynchronous USB
 - wireless option

AGAINST

- slight upper midband sheen