

Press release

audiolab

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Above: Audiolab M-DAC Mini

Small size. Low price. Big performance.

Audiolab extends the award-winning M-DAC range with its smallest, most affordable high-resolution DAC/headphone amp yet

Cambridgeshire, England – Since the launch of the original M-DAC in 2011, Audiolab's range of standalone DACs has earned widespread acclaim and a host of awards from respected audio journals around the world. Last year's arrival of the range-topping M-DAC+ and an all-in-one DAC/amp called the M-ONE extended the family by building upon the same award-winning technology. Now, a fourth model is set to join the M-DAC range: **M-DAC Mini**.

As the name suggests, the M-DAC Mini is the smallest hi-res DAC/headphone amp in the range. At less than £300, it is also the most affordable. Yet it contains the same core technologies that have earned the M-DAC family worldwide acclaim, with the ES9018 Sabre32 Reference DAC nestling at its heart. It is designed to be flexible, with wired and wireless connectivity options to boost sound quality from all manner of digital devices, from phones and computers to TVs and games consoles. It is also the first M-DAC product to cut ties with the mains supply, its built-in rechargeable battery benefitting sound quality as well as adding versatility.

Flexible friend

The M-DAC Mini's design deliberately blurs the lines between home hi-fi DACs and pocket-size portable units. It is ideally sized to sit discretely on a desk or table, with accessible, easy-to-use controls and a traditional analogue volume knob.

There is sufficient room inside to enable in the inclusion of discreet audiophile-grade components in key circuits, eschewing the space-saving compromise often inherent in portable DAC designs. Yet its diminutive form factor makes the M-DAC Mini easy to carry and place wherever it is needed, untethered to the mains supply thanks to its rechargeable battery.

Its size also allows Audiolab to incorporate a useful array of inputs and outputs, increasing versatility whilst maintaining a conveniently compact form factor. There are optical and coaxial digital inputs and outputs, Type-A and Mini-B USB inputs (these are asynchronous with two dedicated master clocks to eliminate jitter), stereo RCA hi-fi outputs and a high-quality 6.3mm headphone socket – great for all manner of headphones, including larger hi-fi designs. Wireless connectivity via Bluetooth, with support for the sonically superior aptX codec, adds further flexibility and convenience.

The list of potential applications for the M-DAC Mini is endless, from vastly improving sound quality from a smartphone, tablet or computer, to connecting multiple digital devices to an existing audio system, or enhancing the sound of a TV or games console to deliver a more immersive entertainment experience.



Small yet mighty

Like the M-DAC and M-DAC+, the M-DAC Mini combines advanced digital-to-analogue conversion with a high-performance Class A JFET output stage and dedicated headphone amp section, to deliver superb sound whether connected to an amp and speakers, or feeding active speakers, or driving a pair of headphones.

The M-DAC Mini's DAC circuitry shares much with its big brother, the £800 M-DAC+. It similarly benefits from ESS Technology's patented 32-bit HyperStream® DAC architecture and Time Domain Jitter Eliminator, unique to the Sabre32 Reference family, surrounded by Audiolab's signature circuitry to make the most of this DAC chip's exemplary performance.

Like the M-DAC+, the M-DAC Mini is equipped to process PCM audio data up to 32-bit/384kHz via USB, ensuring it is primed to take full advantage of hi-res digital sound both now and in the future. The USB

input also supports DSD64, DSD128 and DSD256 – a significant inclusion, as DSD has an important role to play in the developing hi-res audio scene.

Sonic performance is paramount throughout the M-DAC Mini's circuit design. For example, while most portable DACs control volume in the digital domain, which results in lost 'bits' and therefore reduced signal quality, the M-DAC Mini's analogue volume control incorporates a high-quality Alps potentiometer of the kind more commonly found in full-size hi-fi components.

Another point of difference is the proprietary analogue output stage which benefits both the headphone and stereo RCA outputs, incorporating discrete JFET amplification using transistors that are individually measured and matched to minimise distortion and DC offset. This ensures that the M-DAC Mini is just as capable when operating as a hi-fi preamp as it is when powering a pair of headphones through its dedicated headphone amp circuit.

The use of high-quality internal components extends to the low pass filter design on the DAC output stage, which uses EVOX and Panasonic low-ESR capacitors for a more stable performance and increased reliability. This also facilitates improved noise isolation of the power supply – all part of the attention to detail that enables the M-DAC Mini to outperform the competition at its price point.



Battery benefits

The inclusion of battery power for the first time in an M-DAC component is not simply about portability. It also benefits performance by supplying clean and stable DC power – free from the distortion introduced by common switch-mode power supplies, yet without the need for a bulky, costly audiophile-grade mains PSU. A mains charger is included in the package, and iOS devices can be charged from the M-DAC Mini whether the unit is connected to the mains or not.

With its injection-moulded polypropylene casing and machined aluminium front panel and controls, the M-DAC Mini has a distinctive look and a satisfying feel. Available from June at an RRP of £299.95, it is a superbly flexible and affordable way to boost sound from all manner of digital devices.

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Formed in the early 1980s by Philip Swift and Derek Scotland, Audiolab earned worldwide acclaim with the 8000A – an integrated stereo amplifier that became a classic ‘step-up’ from the budget models of the time. Now part of the IAG brand family, Audiolab's recent fame is largely derived from its hugely respected DAC circuitry, earning the company a plethora of awards since the launch of the 8200CD and M-DAC in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Today, the company continues to make highly acclaimed source and amp components, delivering crisp, clean ergonomics, intelligent functionality and sensational sound with everything from vinyl to the latest digital formats.

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