



electromod
the sound connection

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Press contact: Tim Bower

020 8954 8945

07854 966 071

tim@hashstar.co.uk

www.electromod.co.uk

+44 (0)1494 956558



TOPPING

Above Topping E50 II – a ‘giant killer’ DAC at just £199

Divine sound at a down-to-earth price

Topping’s popular ‘E’ series of compact, budget-friendly DACs gains its newest member: the E50 II, delivering a remarkable specification and an eminently accessible price

Buckinghamshire, England – While digital audio specialist Topping has made recent headlines with the discrete DAC technology in its premium-level launches, the company has continued to develop the entry-level end of its range. After all, class-leading performance at accessible prices is how the company built its impressive global reputation.

Its latest design, the E50 II, is a pure DAC (Digital-to-Analogue Converter) with a preamp facility and no onboard headphone amp. It’s designed for convenience and flexibility, with compact dimensions and a range of facilities that belies its price tag of just £199. And while its purpose is to elevate digital sound at home, it’s also ideally specified to perform that role in other environments, including ‘pro’ studios.

The E50 II sits equally comfortably on a desk or alongside other components in a hi-fi system, feeding a headphone amp, integrated amp, power amp or active speakers – or even a combination of these. Versatility, then, is baked in. But what’s even more impressive is its sound.

New-generation D-to-A technology

Japanese chip specialist AKM has been causing a stir in the DAC world with the AK4497S, a new-generation DAC chip representing the latest version of the company's Velvet Sound concept. Launched in 2025, this chip's advanced architecture delivers state-of-the-art technical execution and enables a sound described by AKM as making you feel "as if you were there" at the original musical performance – that's the goal of Velvet Sound.

Most budget-friendly DACs, and even some more pricey models, incorporate inexpensive DAC chips that are often at least two or three generations old – introduced more than a decade ago in some cases. So, to find such an advanced, top-tier chip in a DAC costing under £200 is impressive. The E50 II places this chip at its heart, building its own circuitry around it to deliver maximum sound for minimal outlay.

Jitter – a timing error in digital audio signals that causes audible distortion – is expertly tackled via Topping's TopSync circuit with JitterNull processing. This uses a custom-programmed FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Array) chip with a PLL (Phase-Locked Loop) to deliver precise data synchronisation, thus eradicating jitter from the digital signal. Industry-standard measurement methods show exceptional levels of jitter suppression for a DAC of the E50 II's diminutive price, achieving results as low as -160dB.



Left From the sofa to the desktop, the E50 II's advanced design delivers superb sound with all manner of digital source devices

In combination, this circuitry allows E50 II to deliver outstanding decoding performance, reproducing rich texture and layering across the entire frequency range. From low to high frequencies, it brings you a listening experience that feels lifelike and immersive. In terms of technical performance, the fusion of AKM's new-generation DAC chip with Topping's ultra-low-noise architecture delivers an industry-leading dynamic range of 131dB, alongside THD+N (Total Harmonic Distortion Plus Noise) of 0.0001%@1kHz – exceptional for a DAC at any price, let alone one that costs less than £200.

Smart, versatile design

Housed in a sturdy aluminium enclosure, the E50 II measures 129x41x155mm (WxHxD) – conveniently sized for desktop use – and comes in a choice of black, white or silver. The clutter-free front panel eschews physical controls for a large, central OLED display and a capacitive touch-sensitive button to its

right. The orange colour and segmented style in which numerals are presented is reminiscent of a classic digital clock, giving the DAC a cool retro vibe whilst delivering information with crisp clarity; for anyone who finds the display intrusive, brightness can be adjusted with manual and automated settings.

The E50 II's connectivity array provides adaptability to a wide range of environments. There are three digital audio cable inputs – USB-C, optical and coaxial – and a separate 5V USB-C input isolating power from data, coupled to extensive internal power filtering and regulation. Analogue outputs are provided in two flavours – left/right RCA and left/right 6.35mm TRS, the latter offering a true balanced output.

The single-ended RCA and balanced TRS outputs are individually controllable and can be assigned different parameters such as output level and PEQ settings (more about these below). They can be used simultaneously, enabling the E50 II to feed two separate setups at once – for example, a speaker-based system and a dedicated headphone system.

The E50 II can be used in DAC mode, which fixes the output to feed a separate preamp or integrated amp. Or preamp mode, which engages a high-precision volume control to connect the DAC directly to a power amp or active speakers.



Left The E50 II sports a retro-style OLED display and a useful range of digital inputs and analogue outputs

Viva la resolution

A high-end, 16-core XMOS XU316 chip processes incoming audio data, supporting (in combination with the AKM DAC chip) all levels of PCM to 32-bit/768kHz, together with native DSD to 22.6MHz (DSD512) – the highest of high-resolution audio, now and in the future. A custom Thesycon USB driver is used for audio delivered from Windows PCs (no driver is required for macOS), ensuring stable, lossless playback.

Topping has also included the convenience of device-to-device wireless streaming via Bluetooth, engineered to deliver fully optimised sound quality. Utilising a high-spec Qualcomm QCC5125 chip, a comprehensive suite of high-definition Bluetooth codecs is supported including LDAC and aptX Adaptive up to their maximum 24-bit/96kHz specifications, as well as aptX HD.

Perform like a pro

The E50 II is perfectly formed to deliver elevated digital audio around the home, from a multitude of source devices – smartphones, tablets, PCs, Macs, audio streamers, digital media players and more. And

yet, there are further strings to its bow – especially for those who make music or AV content in a professional or home studio.

The DAC's optical input is equipped with an FPGA-based intelligent detection engine that automatically recognises and decodes not only the usual S/PDIF format but also ADAT, enabling seamless switching between the two. ADAT, also known as 'Lightpipe', is a format widely used in studios for mixing up to eight channels of uncompressed 24-bit audio at sample rates of 44.1kHz or 48kHz.

Another useful feature for 'pro' users is the power of the E50 II's output stage, with user-selectable amplitude across all analogue outputs. This enables precise level matching whether you're feeding a portable headphone amp or driving professional studio speakers, eliminating issues like overload or insufficient drive. Higher output levels are particularly useful in a studio environment, with the E50 II switchable to a maximum 11.3Vrms from the balanced TRS output and 5.6Vrms from the RCA output.

The output stage is fully differential/balanced, eliminating noise and crosstalk. High-quality circuit layout and component choices combine with discrete power regulation to keep the noise floor vanishingly low.



Left The new Topping Home app enables comprehensive control via Android and iOS devices, connecting with the DAC over Bluetooth

This DAC makes you appy

The E50 II is the first of a new generation of compact 'smart DACs' from Topping, compatible with the company's new Topping Home amp for iOS and Android. The app talks to the DAC via Bluetooth, so an internet/Wi-Fi connection is not required, and enables full configuration and control of the DAC via an intuitive interface.

In addition to playback control, volume adjustment, input switching and so on, the app provides access to a range of sonic tuning options, including user-selectable digital filters for both PCM and DSD, and parametric EQ – all adjustable in real time. Although the app provides the most comprehensive user interface, the E50 II can also be controlled by a dedicated remote handset (supplied with the unit) or via the touch control on the DAC itself.

Parametric EQ – Savile Row standards of sonic tailoring

The E50 II supports Topping’s firmware-level PEQ (Parametric Equaliser) system, allowing precise control of frequency, gain and Q (bandwidth) across ten customisable bands. This enables the sound to be precisely tuned to suit the connected equipment, and the differing characteristics of digital sources and acoustic environments, in line with one’s personal sonic taste – no other DAC that is so affordably priced offers such a sophisticated EQ system.

Other Topping DACs that include PEQ use the Topping Tune desktop software for Windows and MacOS to enable their owners to create multiple sound profiles and upload them to the DAC. The E50 II supports this too, but here the full 10-band PEQ system can also be controlled via Android and iOS devices thanks to the Topping Home app. While the Topping Tune software offers a deeper interface for configuring custom profiles and importing target curves, the mobile app adds another layer of convenience for those wishing to use this facility to tailor the sound precisely to their requirements.



Left The E50 II can be teamed with a variety of amps for headphones and/or speakers, including Topping’s identically sized Mini 300

Quality and versatility unrivalled at the price

Much about the E50 II is deeply impressive at its highly accessible price point. Its build quality and versatility; the use of high-end components like the AK4497S chip; smart control via the Topping Home app; useful features for ‘pro’ users; the inclusion of sophisticated PEQ tuning... the list goes on.

Most impressive of all is the quality of its performance, both measured and subjective. With its exceptionally low noise floor and high dynamic range, it reveals an extraordinary level of detail without sounding the least bit harsh or clinical. It engages the listener like no other DAC priced under £200, across all manner of music and other forms of AV entertainment. Whether it’s used to build a desktop headphone setup, or form the heart of a hi-fi or studio monitoring system, or upgrade existing audio/AV devices around the home, the E50 II is a genuine ‘giant killer’ DAC.

The Topping E50 II is now shipping to the UK via Electromod – Topping’s UK distributor – available in a choice of black, white or silver at an RRP of £199. Customers who purchase the DAC from an official UK stockist benefit from a two-year warranty and UK-based tech and servicing support.



TOPPING

Formed in 2008, Topping has forged a formidable reputation for first-rate audio design and engineering that puts its competitors in the shade. The company's range includes class-leading DACs of various 'flavours', some using ESS Technology or AKM chips, others incorporating R2R or proprietary discrete 1-bit DAC technologies, to cater for a wide variety of tastes and preferences. Amplifiers are another speciality, from analogue headphone amps to match the various DACs, to stereo and mono amps for loudspeakers. All punch well above their price points.

toppingaudio.com



Founded by Mark Dolbear, Electromod is a leading UK distributor specialising in head-fi gear, from DACs to amps to headphones and associated accessories. The company focuses on product excellence and a personal style of customer support, operating as official distributor for class-leading brands such as Dan Clark Audio, Dekoni Audio, Écoute, Grell, Topping and Violectric. Mark has an engineering background and has worked in the audio industry since 1995, servicing products from the likes of Mark Levinson, Goldmund, Ayre Acoustic and Stax before forming Electromod.

electromod.co.uk



For more information, please contact Tim Bown
T: 020 8654 8945 M: 07854 966071 E: tim@hashstar.co.uk
