

29 Products on test: Russell K,
Cambridge Audio, Marantz,
Mytek & Chord Electronics

Primare I25 Prisma
Streaming
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Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. **461**

April 2020

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iFi Audio hip-dac **£150**

Looking more like a dapper hip flask, this colourful offering delivers superb sound per pound

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
iFi Audio hip-dac
- ORIGIN**
UK/China
- TYPE**
Portable DAC/headphone amplifier
- WEIGHT**
125g
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
102 x 70 x 14mm
- FEATURES**
- Inputs: USB 3.0 A; USB 3.0 C
 - Outputs: 3.5mm headphone mini-jack; 4.4mm balanced headphone jack
- DISTRIBUTOR**
iFi Audio
- TELEPHONE**
01704 227204
- WEBSITE**
ifi-audio.com

With the strong stylistic overtones of a hip flask, the petrol blue aluminium case – complete with copper-coloured volume knob – certainly stands out from the crowd. It's substantially smaller and slimmer than the Chord, yet still the other designs here look and feel quite tiny in comparison with it. At one end you'll find headphone EQ and XBass buttons, an old-school analogue volume control and 4.4mm balanced and 3.5mm unbalanced headphone outputs. At the other are the male USB 3.0 A input, plus a USB C power socket. iFi supplies three connecting leads, including USB-C, OTG and USB-A-to-USB-C. Apple's Lightning-to-USB Camera Adaptor is needed for iOS devices, but isn't bundled.

Inside is a rechargeable battery giving up to 12 hours playback, plus a Burr-Brown DAC number-crunching up to 32-bit/384kHz or DSD64, 128 and 256. Uniquely in the group, MQA

is supported. DSD handling is said to be native and bit-perfect. Two LEDs around the volume control show format and sampling rate, although they both indicate green for 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz, only changing colour for higher frequencies. Inside is iFi's GMT femto clocking system. This runs firmware which can be upgraded at a later date. A claimed 400mW of power is available, with switchable gain for headphone matching.

The hip-dac isn't the sleekest here but is still good to use, well-built and cool looking. It's an interesting 'halfway house' between the smaller Audiolab, Cambridge Audio, Cyrus and Pro-Ject, and the chunkier Chord.

Sound quality

Despite being half the Mojo's price, the hip-dac compares well. It's not that much more expensive than the less cheaper models and yet is sonically leaps ahead of them. It gives a very detailed and incisive sound

IN SIGHT

- 1 Analogue volume control
- 2 USB 3.0 A port
- 3 USB 3.0 C port (for charging)

that – like the Mojo – doesn't feel like a product that's been compromised to make it portable. The result is a highly resolved performance that's bristling with detail, yet it has great power and speed too. Its naturally bubbly nature seems to make everything you play come alive.

This is most evident on the Marillion track, where the hip-dac gets stuck right in and feels in total control. It lets the instrumental timbre flood out, rendering the harmonic wash of the synthesiser very clearly. Yet there is no sense of it trying to deconstruct things; rather the sound is so detailed that you can effortlessly peer into the mix and focus on your desired instrument.

The Nookie track shows it has good tonal accuracy too; delivering the bassline in a fulsome and bouncy way.

The hip-dac doesn't feel like it's been compromised to make it portable

With Herbie Mann I am struck by how natural the instruments sound as the bright and breezy flute lights up the room, but never lapses into harshness. Moving to the Benjamin Britten classical piece is really impressive. The accuracy with which it frames the stereo soundstage in this live recording is second only to Chord's Mojo. The piece grooves along, yet there is no sense of it being forced out at the listener in any way. Extremely impressive at the price, there's much to commend the hip-dac ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Transparent, musical character; stylish design

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Sampling rate LED design

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Superb sound per pound

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★