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AWARDS 2016

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PLUS DEVORE ORANGUTAN LOUDSPEAKERS • ENTOTEM PLATO
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DAC of the Year

Joint winner: Nagra HD DAC

There are a vast number of excellent DACs on sale at all prices, so it's hard to justify a high price for a DAC unless that digital product is something truly special. The Nagra HD DAC – best used as a two-box design with the optional battery pack – is one DAC that more than justifies its place in the audiophile firmament. This hybrid converter isn't just DSD capable, it upsamples regular CD audio to DSD performance. Of course, if you have Andreas Koch, one of DSD's founding fathers, on the team that helps make this quite simply one of the best digital converters money can buy. The Nagra HD DAC – the first of the company's new super high-end range – calls on the brand's outstanding pro heritage in its use of individual transformers on each input, and relies on its own code instead of an off-the-shelf DAC chip. (Reviewed in Issue 122).

Joint winner: PS Audio DirectStream DAC

Many contemporary DACs are arguably PCM-centric, but the DirectStream DAC takes a different tack, converting all incoming digital audio data streams to DSD format, upsampling them, and proceeding from there. Whether you prefer listening to PCM or DSD format files (or both) there is no arguing with the sublime results the DirectStream DAC achieves. We were and are greatly impressed by the unit's richly detailed and highly nuanced presentation—a presentation that somehow manages to capture much of the fluidity, ease, and sonic grace of today's finest analogue audio components. In short, the DirectStream DAC offers the full spectrum of digital benefits, yet also sounds somewhat like a reel-to-reel analogue tape deck, sans tape hiss, of course. Better still, as the underlying 'operating system' software of the DirectStream DAC continues to be updated, this already excellent sounding DAC continues to get even better over time. (Reviewed in Issues 125 & 128).

