NuForce
µDAC3 headphone amp and DAC

DESPITE ITS AFFORDABLE price and dinky proportions (think Tic-Tac box) the µDAC3 has an eyebrow-raising spec that includes a variable gain headphone amplifier and a 32-bit DAC with support for 96kHz hi-res files of most common types including DSD. That in itself would make it a viable rival to the likes of Cambridge Audio's DACMagic XS (*HFC* 382) and the Audioquest Dragonfly (*HFC* 370), but it ups the ante with RCA phono outputs and a coaxial digital output. The latter allows it to be used simply as a USB-to-S/PDIF convertor in conjunction with a beefier amplifier.

It is solidly built from brushed aluminium and durable plastic with a nicely weighted rotary volume control. There's a 3.5mm headphone jack alongside a single LED, which glows when the USB connection is drawing power from a computer. To the rear are the other outputs and micro USB input (a lead comes supplied). The µDAC3 is compatible with Windows and Mac computers and you need to set the Audio MIDI utility to output at your preferred resolution.

Winging it

Using the µDAC3 principally as an asynchronous USB source with an iMac I find it to really enjoyable to operate and to listen to. The cellos in Brandenburg's *Concerto No. 3* (ALAC) are finely textured and there's plenty of sparkle and detail to the midrange and upper registers of the violins. Overall, it confidently serves up a lively, well imaged soundstage. Wings' *Band On The Run*, a 24/96 ALAC download, is equally engaging as the DAC reveals the subtlety of the layering with the gentle tapping of the cymbals at the start underpinning the scintillating chords of the lead guitar. Some may find its presentation a mite too dry or too analytical, but performance-wise it's a close run thing with Cambridge Audio's DACMagic XS. The latter is smaller, but the µDAC3's volume control makes it nicer to use and the additional outputs make it much more versatile. ***AJ***

DETAILS

PRICE
£90

TELEPHONE
01923 691800

WEBSITE
optoma.co.uk

OUR VERDICT
★★★★½