



Pro-Ject DAC Box RS2 £1,550

The Austrian company's push into affordable electronics continues with this 'out of the Box' option

Pro-Ject has made the realm of 'affordable audiophile' hi-fi its very own. Its range of 'Box' components offer great functionality in a compact case and the DAC Box RS2 personifies this. It's highly specified, has a welter of features and is the most affordable design here.

The only way to accommodate this product's generous feature set is by the provision of a large backlit LC display – which happens to match the company's CD Box RS2, by the way. A neat aluminium remote control unit is supplied, or you can use the fascia buttons to navigate its menu system. Among other things, this lets you select any of the 8 digital filters – we find that the 'Apodizing Fast Filter' works best – or toggle the built-in 6922 tube output stage. No variable volume control is offered.

Inside you'll find modern ESS Sabre ESS9038Q2M DAC chips working in dual mono configuration. Pro-Ject says there are separate signal paths

for the left and right channels for the best possible sound. It handles up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512 over USB. MQA decoding is standard, as is data reclocking. There's a proprietary HDMI connection for the matching CD Box, plus optical, coaxial, AES/EBU and wireless Bluetooth (v4.0) digital connections.

It's hard not to be really impressed by the performance considering the price

Overall build and finish are as good as you can expect for the price; the smooth aluminium fascia comes in a choice of black or silver, with matching steel casework. The sheer number of facilities that the DAC Box RS2 features detracts from its ease-of-use slightly, because the menu system is a little fiddly. That said, there's no denying its great feature set.

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pro-Ject DAC Box RS2

ORIGIN
EU

TYPE
Digital-to-analogue converter

WEIGHT
1.52kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
206 x 72 x 222mm

FEATURES
• 32-bit/768kHz; DSD512; MQA
• Inputs: 2x optical; AES/EBU; i2S; USB-B
• Outputs: stereo RCA; XLR

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.

Sound quality

It's hard not to be really impressed by the performance on offer considering the price of this product. Although not the best-sounding DAC in the group, it's very good across the board, and has its own enjoyable style of music making. The Pro-Ject gives you the big picture – it has an expansive, widescreen feel to the way that it reproduces recordings. It's like sitting back and enjoying a panoramic view of the musical scenery, rather than being more up close and intimate – as you are with the likes of the Benchmark, M2Tech and Sugden.

With ABBA's *Eagle*, this aspect of its sound is clear to hear; it serves up an open and atmospheric rendition of the track. Everything is correctly proportioned and balanced, so it's hard to criticise any aspect of its performance. The only thing is that the DAC Box RS2 lacks some of the pleasingly quirky character traits of some of the others here. For example, it doesn't have the gripping presentation of the Sugden, or the beautifully lustrous midband and bass bloom of the Synthesis. Toggling the tube output stage on helps a bit here however – things warm up down south and the music seems to acquire more rhythmic impetus, in part thanks to the extra emphasis on the bass guitar playing.

The sound is a tad more accurate via the solid-state output stage, but the tube option adds a slightly more romantic feel that suits some music better. For example, the modern electronica of Fryars' *Love So Cold* seems to acquire a dreamier and more enigmatic mood when listened to this way. Ditto the louche jazz of Herbie Hancock, although there's a little softness to the double bass that lessens the effect. It's still not as coloured as the Synthesis Roma, though. However you configure it, the Pro-Ject is a great jack of all trades and way cheaper than some here ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
LIKE: Features, connectivity; fine overall sound

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
WE SAY: Great value do-it-all DAC

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL

