



Pro-Ject **Pre Box RS2 Digital** **£1,900**

The Pro-Ject is a small box with some decidedly big – and surprisingly unusual – ideas

There is still something faintly remarkable in the idea that Pro-Ject – skilled manufacturer of both affordable and more premium turntables – has developed the range of electronics that it has, but the Pre Box RS2 Digital is an elegant demonstration of the scope of the company's ambitions. Essentially, this is a DAC/preamp of the type that has come to dominate most price points. It has a USB, two optical, one coaxial and an i2s input (the latter being of more than abstract interest as Pro-Ject is one of the few companies to make a device with matching output – a CD transport) as well as Bluetooth connectivity. Decoding is via a pair of ESS9038Q2M DACs and sample rates of up to 768kHz PCM and DSD512 are supported.

This is partnered with single RCA and XLR analogue inputs (which can be selected independently) and a volume control that operates in the analogue domain. This analogue domain is unique in the group in that it supports either a solid-state pathway or one that routes via a pair

of valves to either RCA or XLR outputs. Should you be concerned that this is not sufficient customisation, the Pre Box RS2 Digital goes on to offer both adjustable digital and analogue output filters and upsampling options.

There are dozens of possible permutations to how it can be

With valves engaged, this is one of the more energetic-sounding preamps in the group

configured and you can easily lose an afternoon messing about with them. The menu-driven interface to do this is simple enough to navigate and the large display is legible enough to be read at a distance. The casework is small but extremely well finished and the remote control; while a little small, is also the nicest of the handsets in the group (although changing the battery, as is required here, is a pain). Black and silver versions are available.

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
 Pro-Ject Pre Box RS2 Digital
ORIGIN
 Austria/Slovakia
TYPE
 DAC/preamplifier
WEIGHT
 1.71kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 206 x 72 x 222mm
FEATURES
 • RCA; AES/EBU (XLR); XLR preouts
 • RCA; XLR inputs
 • 2x optical; 1x coaxial; 1x AES; 1x i2S; 1x USB inputs
DISTRIBUTOR
 Henley Audio Ltd.



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Sound quality

Connected in the same manner as the other devices in the group, the Pre Box RS2 Digital quickly reveals that it does its best work with its valves engaged. Without them, the performance is slightly hard edged meaning that Beatrice Rana's piano has a slightly brittle quality to it that winds up feeling a little relentless. Engage them and the Pro-Ject loses no dynamics; indeed, it's one of the more energetic-sounding units in the group and there is also a notable improvement to the richness and body of the performance.

The effect this has on Dr Octagon's *Blue Flowers* is genuinely rather surprising. The Pre Box RS2 Digital delivers the lyrics with impressive clarity and definition, but there is a richness and body to the sound that some other models here lack.

When it comes to *The Court*, however, it comes slightly unstuck. While there's a prodigious level of low-end extension, some of the clarity and control that it requires to really integrate with the upper registers isn't present and the result feels a little leaden. It's a shame because Gabriel sounds sublime and the Pre Box RS2 Digital does a great job of capturing the space and three-dimensionality of this excellent piece of mastering.

Champagne Problems is a far happier hunting ground that sees Taylor Swift and the delicate supporting instruments presented to excellent effect.

The overall tonal balance of the Pre Box RS2 Digital's performance via its own digital decoding shows the non-valve output in a far better light; particularly when the filter settings are tweaked. Used logically where it does all your decoding and the analogue section handles a phono stage (of which naturally, there are two matching RS models to choose from), the performance can almost certainly be optimised to be very capable indeed ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent digital section; very flexible; solidly made

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Can sound a little hard edged in some situations

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** A fascinating take on a modern preamp, although it possibly isn't the complete all rounder

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

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