

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Arcam rDAC kw digital converter

By Alan Sircom

Back in issue 76, we looked at the Arcam rDAC, one of the most highly anticipated digital converters out there. With its dCS-licensed asynchronous USB input, Wolfson 8741 chipset and all-round ease of use, the rDAC was the toast of 2010. This year brings the kw version, 'kw' standing for 'KLEER wireless', KLEER being a made-for-audio specific wi-fi standard that allows lossless audio data transmission from computer (or iDevice) to DAC.

The rDAC kw looks identical to the basic rDAC from the front; the only external difference being a small wi-fi aerial socket on the back plate, plus a black 802.11-style aerial



that screws into the thing. You then need to add a dongle; either the rWave USB or rWand for iPod/iPhone/iPad devices, supplied separately.

The former allows you to connect any recent Windows or Mac desktop, laptop or notebook computer, with a range roughly equivalent to 801.11b (up to 50m), while the rWand streams music direct from your iDevice over a shorter (max 10m) range. In reality, I found the rWave connected from tens of metres away along the horizon, but struggled to lock to a signal from a room two floors above the rDAC in a late Victorian property (in fairness, a 802.11g wi-fi router suffers in the same setting). The rWand is best used in the same or adjacent room as the rDAC, which is pretty much what it's intended for.

The rWave effectively simply extends the asynchronous USB connection without the need for cables or having a computer in the listening room (using a tablet in the listening room to control the computer elsewhere). It works by clicking the 'associate' button on the dongle (when fed from a computer) and then pressing and holding the source selector button on the top of the elegant rDAC. When the light goes green, you are ready to rOCK. Does it sound different to a wired connection? Not really. If you have both side by side and spend the next few days listening intently comparing and contrasting, you'll probably hear a difference... and personally I think KLEER has the edge, simply because of the advantages of having the spinning disc drives in another room.

On the other hand, rWand also has an ace up its sleeve. I had some friends over during the test, and ended up with five people armed with iPhones, two iPods and my own iPad. The rWand was passed from person to person as and when they wanted to play DJ entirely seamlessly and effortlessly. Aside

from showing up just how many people compress their music and how that can sound through a good system (a little flat and slightly 'burbly'), it's amazing how natural and how immediate this connection was and how it makes the music-listening process fun once more.

I've found myself returning to the original rDAC time and again, when using it with computers. The same didn't apply with anything with a coax or Toslink connector, where the rDAC seems to blunt

and soften leading edges compared to the USB. But fortunately, the KLEER connection sides with the wired USB input and sounds excellent. That it also sounds excellent at a distance without the need for wires or a safety net really makes it a KLEER buy. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Arcam rDAC kw digital converter

Inputs:

- 1x Optical SPDIF (Toslink socket)
- 1x Coaxial SPDIF (Gold plated socket)
- 1x USB
- 1x KLEER Wireless

Outputs:

2x RCA / Phono sockets (Gold plated)

Output Level: 2.1VRMS (at 0dBFS)

THD+N: 0.003% - (0dBFS, 1kHz, 22Hz to 22kHz, unweighted)

Noise: -104dB - (relative to full scale, 22Hz to 22kHz, unweighted)

Dimensions WxDxH: 16x11.1x4cm

Price: £375

rWave USB dongle £80

rWand iDevice dongle £70

Manufacturer: Arcam Ltd

URL: www.arcam.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)1223 203203

