

# Group test verdict

After a week of indepth comparisons, **Nick Tate** works out the final ranking order and reveals a worthy winner

**THIS IS AN** interesting group with a diverse range of design priorities. In sixth place is the Benchmark DAC3 B. This is a strong product on its own terms; its sound is impressively clear, open and detailed. Build is excellent and there's a complete lack of frills, which many will find attractive. All this said, the group is a tough one and it just doesn't shine in value terms.

Next is the M2Tech Young MkIV, which sounds very good but is crying out for the company's optional power supply. If that well-lit treble could be tamed just a touch, this would really be something. As it stands, it's very

musically rewarding to listen to, just match it carefully to smooth systems.

The Sugden Masterclass DAC-4 is nearly a decade old and contains a chip that dates back to the Nineties, yet it has the satisfyingly feisty get-up-and-go of classic multibit DACs. Its digital specification is now ancient – but somehow that just doesn't matter. A real curio this, it's well worth a listen.

Pro-Ject's DAC Box RS2 ranks third, despite being the lowest-priced option in the group by a considerable margin. It does a lot, very well – and costs nearly £500 less than the group

average. It has a smooth, crisp, detailed sound that's really very impressive for the money – while the switchable tube output adds a little bit of character too.

Musical Fidelity's M6x DAC is a worthy runner-up. Although not the best-sounding here in outright terms, it does an awful lot very well indeed. It's tonally smooth, has an expansive stereo soundstage, glides along with the music in an enjoyable way and is decent dynamically too. Factor in its connectivity and versatility, and it's hard not to like...



**WINNER**

The Synthesis Roma 69DC ticks most boxes, is beautifully finished and plays music with an authentic sense of emotion. It really tugs at your heartstrings, making digital audio a tactile delight. The best DACs do, of course, but very rarely at such a reasonable price.

Make/model	Benchmark DAC3 B	Musical Fidelity M6x DAC	M2Tech Young MkIV	Pro-Ject DAC Box RS2	Sugden Masterclass DAC-4	Synthesis Roma 69DC
Price/month	£2,050	£2,100	£2,050	£1,550	£2,215	£2,500
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	A great stripped-down DAC with an engaging sound and no digital nasties	A smart jack-of-all-trades, this large, full-size design has a civilised sound	Full of charisma, this DAC brings a high level of involvement to your music	Highly versatile, configurable and affordable with a good performance	The definition of a quirky product, this is a seriously enjoyable music maker	Superbly packaged, handsome half-width DAC with great build and sound
Website	benchmarkmedia.com	musicalfidelity.com	m2tech.biz	project-audio.com	sugdenaudio.com	synthesis.co.it

## Key features

	Benchmark	Musical Fidelity	M2Tech	Pro-Ject	Sugden	Synthesis
DSD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Bluetooth	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Headphone	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
XLR output	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Upsample	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

## TRY WITH THESE

### STREAMER: Cambridge Audio CXN V2 **£300 HFC 437**

The CXN V2 has a digital output that can be usefully upgraded by adding a high-quality DAC. Its Stream Magic platform is also faultless: it's reliable, easy to use and has a great app. Crisply styled and well finished, its sound is usefully upgraded by any of these mid-price DACs.



### CD PLAYER: Marantz CD60 **£600**

CD sales continue to hang in there and while many music lovers still have very large CD libraries, this beautifully built and finished budget player has a good-quality transport. It's greatly improved by any of these DACs, as its own internal designs is its weak link.



### BLU-RAY PLAYER: Sony UBP-X800M2 **£300**

There's a small but committed bunch of Blu-ray Audio fans and this player plays pretty much every hi-res format around, including legacy DVD-Audio, and has a coaxial digital output for hooking up an external DAC. Many think hi-res disc-based audio sounds better than hi-res streaming, hence the utility of machines like this.



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