

iFi hi-fi

Jon Myles connects iFi's slim Nano iOne DAC to his computer - and loves what he hears.

In these days of all-singing, all-dancing components (amplifiers with DACs and Bluetooth, CD players with network capabilities etc), there's something refreshing about iFi's Nano range.

A series of small, slim boxes, they are engineered to do a specific job in the replay chain - be it a regenerated USB power supply, headphone amplifier or, as in the case of the Nano iOne here, an off-board DAC.

If you've not come across iFi before it's a relatively new company but an offshoot of Abingdon Music Research (AMR) - well-known for its amplifiers and CD players. Indeed, iFi makes much of the fact that some of the technology is trickled down from AMR's top-line products.

Its products, though, are aimed firmly at the computer audio and home entertainment generation and so the iOne's marketing highlights the fact that it can be hooked up to a Google Chromecast, 4K television, Apple TV, Xbox and Playstation to improve sound, as well as being used with a smartphone, tablet or computer.

The circuit is built around a Burr-Brown multi-bit DAC which supports PCM up to 24bit/192kHz, DSD up to 12.4MHz and DXD to 384kHz. There's also aptX and AAC Bluetooth capability incorporated (a small button on the front facilitates pairing).

Housed in an aluminium case measuring 25.5mm x 64mm x 100mm (H/W/D) and tipping our scales at 122g, inputs consist of a combined S/PDIF coaxial/optical and one USB 3.0 (which also doubles as the power supply) housed on the rear, alongside a single pair of RCA outs. The front contains two toggle switches - one for input selection the other for the digital filter. The latter has two settings - one for listening which is minimum phase and a standard one which is recommended for taking measurements.

Finally, a circular window on the front displays different colours to indicate the incoming source file type and its resolution - so you'll get red for standard CD, cyan for 24bit/192, blue for DSD64 etc.

SOUND QUALITY

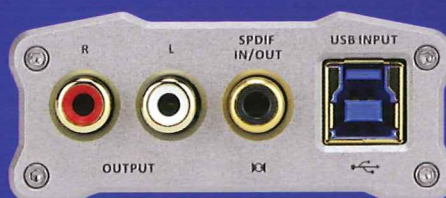
Connecting the iFi to a MacBook Air with a selection of high-resolution tracks, there was a clean and open sound on offer. Vocals were particularly well highlighted. A 24/96 rip of Diana Krall's 'Live In Paris' showcased her distinctive inflections and smoky jazz voicings.

Behind her, the band was presented with good detail alongside nice separation between the instruments. Rhythmically the iFi was taut, with a good sense of tempo but without pushing the music at you - instead allowing it to flow naturally.

With Joy Division's 'She's Lost Control' (24/192) the opening

electronic percussion notes hit hard and also emerge from a silent background - a testament to how well the iFi eliminates the inherent noise from computer sources.

Flicking the front rocker switch to BT (for Bluetooth) then pairing and relaying music via an iPhone, the iFi's presentation remained similar - and actually is one of the best I've heard via this method. Jan Garbarek's 'In Search Of Dreams' was virtually indistinguishable from the same track relayed via CD. Every note and key



The rear of the unit has RCA outs plus SPDIF and USB inputs.

change on the saxophone was there, with a broad swell to the sound.

The only downside is that bass is not the most fulsome. There's a lightness of touch to it which means some dance and dub tracks didn't power through quite as I'd like. But that's a minor point compared to how well the iFi performs in all other areas - especially at just £199.

CONCLUSION

Small and versatile - the iFi Nano iOne is an excellent DAC.



IFI NANO IONE £199



EXCELLENT - extremely capable.

VERDICT

A compact DAC which has the ability to improve the sound from computer-based music files.

FOR

- crisp sound
- inputs
- price

AGAINST

- slight lack of bass

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