DAC TALK

Around 10 years ago, the Wolfson Microelectronics WM8740 was the industry's DAC chip of choice, and is still used today – in the YBA overleaf for example. Then came the pricier ESS Sabre32, which still powers many CD players and DACs. Wolfson's WM8742 duly followed in 2012, and this is the digital converter that the Rega Apollo uses. Whether you're talking Philips, Burr-Brown, Crystal Semiconductors, Texas Instruments or AKM DACs, designers have their own personal favourites; Wolfson has its devotees too and its admirers are particularly enthusiastic about its bass performance. The popular WM8742 is a dual-mode design that can work in either PCM or DSD mode, and has multi-bit Sigma-Delta architecture. It's claimed to have a high tolerance of clock jitter, plus an excellent signal-to-noise ratio.

Rega Apollo £629

The most eccentric machine here by a mile, there's no doubting that some will love it while others won't.

Although cheaper than the other machines, this player is included in the group because it punches above its weight. Basically a rehash of Rega's popular Apollo R, it is housed in a distinctive aluminium case to match its Brio amplifier sibling. The only top-loader here, the cantilevered disc door is a pleasure to use – seventies throwbacks like me who grow up using vinyl will love the tacitility of placing the disc in the machine. The large red central display is both easily readable and – complete with its nineties-taste 'music calendar' – retro looking. The need itself is a little noisy as it reads the disc's table of contents: very old-school. The control buttons make ergonomic sense, but being small are a tad fiddly.

The Apollo's Wolfson WM8742 DAC chip is venerable now: it has been around for a while so no longer requires the same level of care as it is when new. It's a high-quality player and the keyboard is a delight, especially when compared to the more basic units in the group. The sound quality is excellent, with a clean and detailed soundstage. The bass is tight and well-defined, while the treble is clear and crisp. The overall sound is balanced and engaging, with a strong sense of presence.

The Rega Apollo is a charming musical performer, with a focus on delivering a detailed and nuanced sound. While it may not have the same punch as some of the other machines, it is a joy to use and a delight to listen to. It is a great choice for those looking for a high-quality DAC at an affordable price.