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# dCS

## Rossini Apex DAC

DAC £26,775



### The most capable digital-to-analogue converter we have ever reviewed

**R**ossini's 24-bit Ring DAC conversion technology has been at the core of the company's digital components since its first audio product, the 900 ADC, in 1987. The DAC circuit is a fully discrete electronic design that runs custom software and claims to deliver class-leading performance.

Over the years the Ring DAC design has seen steady improvements, particularly on the software side of things – and wherever possible, the company has commendably made these software upgrades available to existing owners for free. The Apex in this latest product's name signifies a major overhaul of the circuit, including changes to the reference power supply that feeds the DAC circuitry, improvements to components and their layout, as well as revised software. The analogue board has been significantly upgraded too.

The company describes the Rossini Apex as an upsampling network DAC. We are not quite sure how that makes it different from what we call a music streamer, but here it seems the job of conversion is central, leaving the streaming abilities secondary.

The UPnP streaming module can play music across a home network and access music streaming services such as Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and Spotify Connect. Internet radio is on the menu, as is Apple AirPlay and Roon Ready compatibility, all controlled through the company's relatively slick Mosaic app for iOS and Android.

The Rossini Apex DAC is something of a tweaker's delight. We appreciate some people like to fine-tune such things but the choice of filter options is bewildering, and while there are certainly differences, they are hardly of the make-or-break variety.

The dCS is  
atweaker's  
delight,  
with many ways  
to fine-tune

#### WHAT HI-FI?

##### SOUND



##### BUILD



##### FEATURES



##### FOR

- Outstanding detail and sonic authority
- Expressive dynamics

##### AGAINST

- Streaming module isn't as impressive as the DAC section
- Bewildering array of filter options

##### VERDICT

An exceptional performer that sets sky-high standards for performance and pricing

"A wonderfully open and expressive midrange communicates the passion in vocals superbly"



Much more useful is the ability to change the Apex's maximum analogue output level in four steps, from 0.2v to 6 volts, to help compatibility with a partnering preamplifier or power amp. You can also connect to an outboard master clock. Every digital product has a clock built-in; it's how all the parts of the digital circuit synchronise, and the more accurate the clock is, the better the performance – though the master clock built into the Rossini is really good (obviously, given the price), and it's not a cheap upgrade. There are USB Type A and B, coaxial, BNC coax, optical and AES/EBU inputs, and outputs in single-ended RCA and Balanced XLR flavours. Fit and finish are faultless and all the controls work with enviable precision.

#### THRILLING LISTEN

Listening to Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* is a treat. The Rossini Apex makes short work of the music's complexity and savage dynamic swings. Everything sounds wonderfully in control, yet this number cruncher doesn't dilute the energy or drive in the music one jot. We sit in front of our reference ATC SCM50 speakers thrilled, transfixed by the authenticity of the performance. Instruments are wonderfully textured and rendered with confidence.

We are impressed by the authority and scale of the Rossini's presentation. It

sounds solid and full-bodied in a way that digital products very rarely do. We also admire the stability, focus and layered nature of the dCS's stereo imaging. It's an expansive presentation, one which leaves plenty of space around the instruments regardless of the complexity of the music.

Tonally, things are less of a surprise. In our experience dCS always tunes its products to be as neutral and even-handed as possible, but while some of the company's earlier products – for all their wealth of abilities – erred on the side of clinical sterility, the Rossini Apex sweeps us away with the musical experience.

Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* reveals lots of detail and an impressive degree of organisation, accompanied by a surefooted rhythmic ability. Low frequencies are painted with power, grip and agility and there is a wonderfully open and expressive midrange that communicates the passion and nuances in vocals superbly.

We try the various digital inputs and different file types from 24-bit/88.2kHz PCM files of Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* and Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* in DSD to Beethoven's *Ninth* in 24-bit/192kHz, and the dCS takes it all in its stride, delivering transparency of the highest order.

Yes, this DAC is hugely expensive, yet judge it by performance and it is hard to imagine how it can be bettered.

WHAT HI-FI?  
★★★★★

