

NuForce uDAC 3 Review

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Projector specialist Optoma recently bought the US audio company NuForce and is now bringing it's range of products to the UK. We've spent some time with their diminutive portable DAC (digital analogue convertor), so what is it like?



The first question many people might have is , what is it for? Most people's desktop or laptop computers probably don't have high end audio cards in them, and so the purpose of the NuForce uDAC 3 is to enable you to have an improved listening experience from your computer, either through headphones or connected to your stereo.

Build

As I've already mentioned, it's rather small. It's about half the size of a pack of cards and feels about the same weight. You get a small metal box with a volume dial and headphone socket on the front, and RCA stereo outputs and a Coaxial socket on the back for those who want to connect it to a stereo. It connects to your computer via micro-USB at the rear, and requires no other external power source. Whilst the device is small and well made, I did find the micro-USB cable didn't plug all the way into the device and wobbled as a consequence. It didn't affect usage, but it didn't fill me with confidence either, despite being secure.

Spec wise, the uDAC 3 has quite a lot going on under the hood. Not only does it support high bit rate audio in virtually any format you care to mention, but it also does so asynchronously. This means that it's less likely to suffer audio jitter when playing high bit rate audio, including high end stuff like DSD ([Direct Stream Digital](#)) which some manufacturers are starting to promote.

The uDAC 3 is designed to be plug and play, but rather counter-intuitively, I found I had to manually select audio output on both my Windows desktop and MacBook. Maybe it's me doing things wrong again!



Performance

I must admit this is a bit of a surprise! This tiny little device makes a world of difference to my audio. Whether listening to music, podcasts, or even films and games, audio always sounded much clearer and more enjoyable. I wouldn't describe the DAC as clinical or neutral, but it does give a warm natural sound. This is a warm blanket on a crisp winter day.

Whilst increasing detail I could here on tracks, they also sounded transparent, a little closer, more energetic. Bass had a bit more oomph, without getting carried away, and whilst the midrange and high ends had a bit more snap. It was never tiring, just the opposite, it made everything more enjoyable, lush and invigorating.

I admit that some people may not like this colouring of audio, but I think the vast majority of people will appreciate the huge difference it makes compared to the standard audio from your computer, no matter how high a quality recording it is.

There are very slight differences between the sound when connected to a stereo via the coax, and via the headphones, but that could be down to the equipment connected to it.

Summary

I'm normally torn about what to say at this point of a review, weighing up pros and cons etc. Before I started using the NuForce uDac 3, I was a bit sceptical about such devices, but this has completely won me over. Ok, I lie. Not completely. I am slightly concerned by the shallow micro-usb socket, and I don't think it's too much to ask for a small pouch to be included when buying this. I've had to supply my own so I can chuck it in my laptop bag and pull it out when needed.

Let me be blunt. Do you want to improve your audio experience when listening to anything from your computer? Yes? Buy it! [£100](#) seems like a small price to pay for a small, portable piece of HiFi which potentially makes a big difference to your everyday life. I'm seriously considering pairing one of these with some quality desktop speakers at home, as well as using it when travelling, but listening to music / watching films on my laptop.