



Audioengine D2 Premium 24-bit Wireless DAC

By Mark Marcantonio

Audioengine's new D2 Wireless DAC provides an elegant solution for those wanting a higher-quality streaming solution than just a wireless transmitter, which the Hong Kong-based manufacturer offers with its highly successful W1 and W2 wireless analog transmitters. The new W2 digital transmitter, priced at \$599 for the set, is integrated with a two-piece DAC system that comprises separate sender and receiver units. The system is capable of processing 24-bit/192-kHz music files, with the ability to stream 24-bit/96-kHz files.

The sender unit is connected (and powered, if desired) via USB connection, with an optical input also available. The sender then transmits the digital signal to the receiver via a walled wireless 802.11g network. The system removes output-level distortion from the equation with a separate signal. The D2 system can work with up to three receiver units in different listening systems.

Highly versatile, the D2 DAC can be used as more than a standard computer-based wireless DAC: It is equally at home acting as a PCM-to-home-stereo link and as a wireless USB-to-S/PDIF convertor. The latter proves handy with my reference SimAudio 300D DAC, which features a USB limited input for 16-bit/44.1-kHz files.

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FEATURE

Nuts and Bolts

The D2 DAC presents a clean and compact design aesthetic consisting of dark-grey brushed aluminum casework with thick plastic end caps. The sender and receiver units each measure 4.75 inches wide, 5.5 inches deep, and 1 inch high—each unit is barely larger than three CD cases stacked on top of each other.

The faceplate of each unit has two grayish LED buttons—one for power and one for pair-sync status. The sender has a silver output volume control knob, optical and USB inputs and a jack for the wall-wart power supply. The receiver has RCA output jacks occupying the same space as the knob and USB port on the sender. An optical output and power jack receptacle finish off the receiver's front. The back panels of both units hold only the dual antennas. A few may grumble about front-facing jacks, but small-stature equipment does require compromise on occasion.

Up and Running

Setting up both the D2 units to pair with either an Apple MacBook or Windows Vista desktop and main audio system took less time than unpacking and reading the brief but informative manual. *(continued)*

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For Macintosh owners, simply open up the sound control in your computer's system preferences and select "Audioengine D2". Windows users verify connection in the sound application of your control panel menu. In either case, make sure to start with the sender unit's output turned all the way up. Typical of all Audioengine products, the D2 system comes with a full assortment of cables, so running to RadioShack won't be necessary.

For owners of larger homes or those broadcasting to or from a studio or garage, the D2 transmission range easily exceeds 100 feet, according to Audioengine, and will transmit through one exterior and one interior wall without signal degradation. I tested the transmission through an exterior wall and five interior walls at a distance of some 70 feet and the D2 yielded equally good results.

At just \$599 with full wireless functionality, one might bet that the D2's DAC section would be the weak link. Here, the PCM1792A chip serves the DAC well. Consistency across the spectrum with all components is a big thing with us here at *TONEAudio*, and the D2 DAC performed above expectations across the board.

Peak Performer

Listening to the D2 DAC, the one word that keeps coming to mind is "smooth." The D2 is a budget DAC that successfully avoids the dreaded listener fatigue. When using the D2, bass guitar definition has a solid punch in The Burned's toe-tapping "Hard Lesson," along with a pleasant richness and depth. On the top end of the frequency spectrum, the D2 delivers Kathleen Edwards' clear vocals in "Change the Sheets" without the grain or irritation that plague most DACs at this price point. The soul of music lives in the midrange and the xylophone in Steely Dan's classic "Aja," which comes across with the sweet warmth that many budget DACs miss.

The Audioengine D2 DAC offers convenience and high performance in a compact package that is reasonably priced. Computer audiophiles take note. ●

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