

small spaces audio

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Audioengine D1 24-Bit Headphone DAC

[Link to Specifications](#)

It's no exaggeration that DAC's have come a long way in a very short period of time. The ability to take good sound on the road the necessity for quality, portable DAC's are more important than ever. This mindset isn't just for the middle-agers either, young people with their quality headphones are the drivers of this market.



There are two ways the portable market can go regarding add-on DAC's, the USB jump drive style, or the separate small wire connected component. The Audioengine D1 at \$169 falls into the latter category. About the size of a packet of cigarettes, the D1 packs a bucketload of features into its small case. The biggest advantage is the addition of the op-amp and volume

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control, allowing for a wider range of headphones, while still being driven by only the power from the USB port.

The D1 case is an ergonomic home run, a seam-less long oval of dark grey anodized aluminum with black caps for the front and rear faces. The solid and comfortable feel of the unit is an instinctive cue that the D1 is a serious piece of portable audio. The front holds the volume knob, small illuminated power button and mini-headphone jack. While the back offers a nice quality left and right RCA output jacks, Optical and USB inputs.

Setup with the computer of your choice is quite easy, just follow the short directions and start listening. With its AK4396 chip and asynchronous operation the USB input can handle 24/96 files, while the optical accepts 24/192. For this review I tried both and have no qualms with recommending either option.

My MacBook source is a combination of iTunes/Amarra. For head gear I spent time between my Skull Candy 50/50 in-ear buds, Grado SR60i, and for a bit of over the top listening the Sennheiser HD800. For speaker listening included time with the Harbeth Compact 7es3, and Totem Acoustic Rainmakers.

The Traveling Willburys "The End of the Line" the opening guitar is both smoother and richer via the D1. Tom Petty's unique vocal style as well as the late great Roy Orbison offers excellent distinct details far greater than coming directly from the computer. The volume control on the D1 is far more effective when I had the iTunes output volume set at about 40% of max volume. This allowed for the D1's volume control to have a smooth, steady climb up the decibel chart.

The additional artifacts from "Just Breathe" by Pearl Jam that the D1 pulls from the digital realm include the slight hesitation in the vocals in the beginning of the first chorus. equally impressive is proper amount of attention the bass guitar is given to open the second verse, similar to my reference SimAudio 300D DAC. The D1 can't match the 300D in resolution nor should it at 1/7th the price. What it does do is offer up is an enjoyable musical recreation.

