

• DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER

Chord DAC is a diamond performer

OUTBOARD DAC
CHORD
CHORDETTE GEM



£ 399

↑ FOR

An effective upgrade to PC or music phone sound through your hi-fi; great build and finish

↓ AGAINST

It's a shame traditional hi-fi inputs, such as optical or coax aren't included

↔ VERDICT

It's great to see a specialist hi-fi company try something different. The Chordette Gem is a fine product

THIS IS AN outboard DAC, but not as we know it. Chord isn't aiming for the hi-fi enthusiast who wants to upgrade their old CD player or buy a competitively priced two boxer. No, the

“Whatever the input, the Gem delivers a clear, detailed sound”

Gem's targets are laptop and music phone users.

So determined is Chord not to attract the typical hi-fi crowd that it has even omitted both conventional digital inputs. No, look for optical and electrical connections and you'll be disappointed.

Instead, you've got the option of a USB connection (the B type rectangular one) or Bluetooth, making use of the delivery system's A2DP

(Advanced Audio Distribution Profile) digital audio signal.

The Gem's build quality is excellent, and finish is as good as we've seen at this price level. Remember, up to this point Chord's cheapest electronics started with a price tag of a couple of grand; it's amazing the company has maintained its usual high build standards even at this relatively low price point.

Once connected – which is a process as easy as these things can be – this Chord DAC makes a strong case for itself.

Whatever the input, the Gem delivers a clear and detailed sound with far stronger dynamics than our Acer laptop, Apple iMac or Samsung music phone produced when tasked with playing music on their own.

Detail resolution is extremely good and dynamics have both subtlety and power.

Keep those bit rates high

We must give a word of warning, however. The Gem's truthfulness makes it even more important than usual that you keep recording bit-rates high – we'd recommend 320kbps as an absolute minimum with Apple Lossless or WAV being ideal.

This DAC is a really brave attempt by Chord to attract new people to its brand, and we hope it works out. The Chordette Gem is simply a fine product.



ALSO
CONSIDER



CAMBRIDGE
AUDIO DAC MAGIC



£200

Awards 2008
Not as musical, but it has hi-fi inputs, is a fine performer, and half the price

CHORD
QBD76



£3000

December 2008
The Gem's big brother; more features, better sound and a massively heftier price tag