



AFFORDABLE

NuPrime DAC-10H

\$1795

NuPrime is a relatively new audio manufacturer created when Jason Lim, with backing from the OEM factory, bought the assets of NuForce's high-end division, obtained the rights to NuForce technologies, and formed NuPrime Audio, Inc. (Shortly afterward the NuForce company was sold to Optoma.) Although the DAC-10H is only 8" wide by 2.4" high by 14" deep, which corresponds to roughly half the width of a "full-sized" component, it packs a lot of features and performance into a small package. The DAC section is built around the ESS Sabre Reference ES9018 32-bit chip. According to NuPrime this chip can deliver 135dB signal-to-noise with -120dB total harmonic distortion levels. On the analog side, the DAC-10H has borrowed the stepped, thin-film, switched-resistor ladder network for controlling volume from the NuForce P-20 preamplifier. Even if you are prepared to spend far more than what the DAC-10H costs, SS recommends giving it a listen. It delivers true high-performance for far less money than you might expect. SS, 255

DACs & DAC/PREAMPS OF THE YEAR

COST-NO-OBJECT

Antelope Audio Zodiac Platinum

\$12,995

The Antelope Audio Zodiac Platinum DSD256 upsampling DAC, Voltkus PSU, and 10M Rubidium clock make up Antelope's newest, flagship "home audio" DAC. The system comprises three separate boxes—a control unit, a power supply, and an external clock. The Zodiac DAC has its own internal clock so it can be used without the 10M Rubidium external clock, but for optimal performance, Antelope recommends employing the 10M clock unit as part of the complete Platinum system. As Steven Stone reported in his review, the Antelope Audio Zodiac Platinum system is the best digital front-end he's had in his home. And while you can, if you wish, certainly spend more on a DAC/pre, even if you are planning on dropping a bushel of dollars you should, for sonic reference, hear the Antelope Audio Zodiac Platinum DSD DSD256 Upsampling DAC, Voltkus PSU, and 10M Rubidium clock. SS has yet to review a sonically superior or more ergonomically elegant DAC/preamp. SS, 248





AFFORDABLE

NuPrime ST-10
\$1595

The NuPrime ST-10 amplifier is what NuPrime calls “near-reference class.” Why only near-reference? As far as Steven Stone can tell it’s near-reference because this stereo amplifier only puts out 150 watts per channel into an 8-ohm load. For him the most outstanding aspect of the DAC-10H’s sonic performance is its silence—because the ST-10’s excellent signal-to-noise lets the music emerge with a level of delicacy and subtlety that more closely approaches what he hears from a live musical event. He was especially impressed by the ST-10’s performance at the top and bottom of its range. The bass was taut, tuneful, and controlled. Conversely, the upper midrange and treble were airy yet accurate. Depth recreation, dimensionality, and image specificity were also exemplary through the ST-10. On SS’s live DSD128 recordings of the Boulder Philharmonic, the soundstage was accurately portrayed, with instruments reproduced with a level of specificity equal to the best SS has heard from any amplifier in his systems. SS, 255

POWER AMPLIFIERS OF THE YEAR

MID-PRICED

Odyssey Stratos
\$2500/pr.

These \$2500, high-speed, high-bandwidth monoblocks from Odyssey Audio’s Klaus Bunge are phenomenally good for the money: dense in tone color, quick on transients, high in resolution, and spacious in soundstaging, with a touch of three-dimensional imaging uncommon in solid-state. Of course, there is a reason for this—family heritage. As was the case with Klaus’ near-equally wonderful Khartago stereo and mono amps, the Stratos uses the exact same circuit as Germany’s celebrated Symphonic Line monoblock amplifiers. Even if you A/B’d the Strati with super-amps like Soudation’s 711 (as JV did), you might still find yourself pondering whether the difference in sound justifies the difference in expenditure. That JV ultimately thought it did is beside the point. The way he sees it, the fact that the Odyssey Stratos monoblocks could give even a picky listener like him pause makes them super-amps in their own right. Yes, you can spend more and buy better. The question, as JV said in his review, is: “Do you really want to?” JV, 248



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS
OF THE YEAR

AFFORDABLE

NuPrime IDA-16

\$2600

The IDA-16 is an excellent example of the “new” integrated amplifier, with both digital and analog inputs, a 200Wpc Class D amplifier, and a DAC capable of playing music files ranging up to 384/24 for PCM and DSD256—which includes all currently available albums—in a slim, stylish package. With five digital inputs and one analog input, and an analog output to drive subwoofers, the IDA-16 is well suited for today’s audio systems. Although listenable right out of the box, the IDA-16 becomes more dynamic and delicate with 150-200 hours’ break-in. Highs are smooth, detailed, and very extended, though not at all peaky. Bass is also extended, with tons of impact. The midrange lacks just a smidgen of the detail present in other, more expensive amplifiers. The soundstage is quite wide, with instruments realistically distributed between the speakers. Voices are unstrained and pure-sounding, indicating low distortion. At \$2600, the IDA-16 offers considerable value for the money. Vade Forrester, 252



MID-PRICED

Hegel H160

\$3500

The Norwegian company Hegel Music Systems has sallied into the integrated market with its superlative H160. Much like the country it hails from, the compact H160 lands on the cool side of neutral. It’s a solid-state unit that never sounds strident or glassy but always provides a superbly transparent and controlled presentation. Much of this sonic purity is a product of Hegel’s innovative SoundEngine technology, which constantly adjusts the operating parameters of the Class AB amplifier’s output transistors for optimal performance. The aim of this technological wizardry is both to reduce distortion and improve damping in real time. Packed with a variety of features, including the ability to stream wirelessly via an Ethernet input, the H160 can drive most loudspeakers with ease. At its relatively modest price, it is a potent reminder of the rapid sonic advances that the high end has made over the past decade. JHb, 254



UPPER-END

Jadis DA-88S Mk II

\$14,500

The Jadis DA-88S Mk II is not a good tube integrated amplifier. It is a superb one. It deploys KT-120 output tubes—a total of eight—to deliver a very robust 60 watts that can drive big loudspeakers like Wilson’s XLF with aplomb. The DA-88S Mk II is self-biasing for ease of use and features a balance control, something that has gone out of fashion but can be quite useful. Its imposing hand-wound transformers clearly have a salubrious effect upon the purity of the sound. The Jadis allies liquidity with great dynamic power. Its sonic character is worlds removed from current solid-state designs. This is a unit engineered by and for tube lovers. The resolution, palpability, and, above all, sense of sweep conveyed by the Jadis are seldom less than glorious. JHb, 253