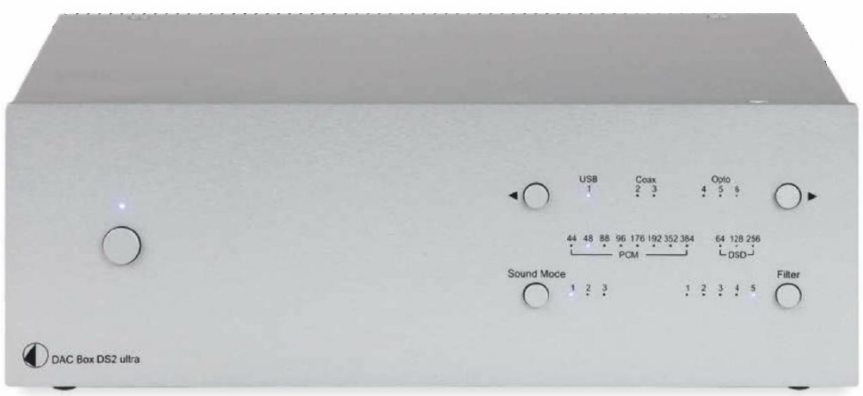
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS2 ultra

Pro-Ject’s most ambitious ‘Box series’ USB DAC to date not only handles DSD256 but is trimmed with tweaks to attract the enthusiast-on-a-budget. Is it really fully-loaded?



It’s the most upmarket model the company makes and uses the premium ‘Verita’ AKM4490EQ converter from Japanese company Asahi Kasei. This confers 768kHz/32-bit capability as well as quad-DSD, and provides a number of user-selectable digital filters.

The AKM4490 is becoming a popular device among manufacturers wanting to bring extended high-resolution capability to their products.

It’s used here with the same company’s AK4137 sample-rate converter, which is used to upsample all incoming digital content to 768kHz before it’s passed to the DAC, making the most of the high-speed operation of the converter to shift noise well out of the audio spectrum.

IMPRESSIVE PERFORMER

Given the source of the enabling technology – as already noted, the DAC is found in some very good equipment – it’s hardly surprising that the DS2 ultra is capable of a pretty impressive performance, whether with CD-quality content, hi-res PCM or even DSD files. The sound is clean, precise and informative, if a little bleached at times.

Sound Quality: 79%

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I’d probably waste an evening or two experimenting with the various options, then stick to Sound Mode 1 and Filter 4, the latter giving the sound marginally more snap and slightly tighter image focus than 5. Things are even pretty impressive with CD quality music, as one might hope: I loaded up Radiohead’s newly released outing, *A Moon Shaped Pool*, and enjoyed the way the DS2 ultra unravelled the dense, mesmeric mix. Pushing the limits of what the DS2 ultra can do is a bit tricky, given the relative lack of content beyond 192kHz/24-bit and DSD64. However, drawing on downloads of familiar albums from the useful 2L label ‘Testbench’, plus some albums from the always excellent NativeDSD.com, I was able to establish that, despite its slightly lightweight overall balance, this DAC Box was able to demonstrate the benefi ts of higher sampling rates not in the way one actually hears the music, but in the richness of the tone of instruments and the areas of presence and air.