

Do It All

If only you knew it, how Furutech do it, says Paul Rigby as he plugs in their Alpha Design Labs GT40 phono stage/USB DAC/headphone amplifier...

Furutech is known for its excellent cable products and quirky accessories such as the Demag LP demagnetiser and Disc Flattener, both of which have been reviewed in this very journal. The company has now released an equally quirky new product, but this time under the new brand name of Alpha Design Labs. Compact at just 150x111x57mm and weighing in at just 785g, the GT40 is positively schizophrenic in the facilities it has on offer.

Firstly, you get a USB DAC, which is ideal to connect to a computer or laptop up to a resolution of 24bit/96kHz via plug and play. Next is a headphone amp that features a single, full-sized 6.3mm jack. Finally, there's a phono amp which allows you to connect both MM or MC cartridges, as well as Line inputs. There's also a phono A-D convertor that allows you to plug your turntable and your computer into the GT40 and then transfer your vinyl music to the hard disk.

The front fascia of the exceedingly well built chassis includes a beautifully machined volume knob for both playback and headphone volume, a headphone port, power button and source button selectors for phono or USB. On the rear, you have the phono/line inputs and outputs, phono ground and USB socket, 9V external power socket for the supplied integrated power supply/plug unit and a tiny input selection switch to choose MM, MC or line.

Connecting the GT40 to my PC was simple. I connected the USB port to the GT40 and the computer and the drivers automatically installed

themselves. You need to check volume levels, though. This involved entering the Control Panel utility on my PC and, on my Vista-powered operating system at least, selecting Sounds, then Audio Devices then making sure both of the correct devices are selected in the Playback and Recording tabs. You should also make sure that the levels are set to 100%. For some reason, mine was set to 24%!

SOUND QUALITY

Playing a range of ripped WAV files via my PC through a venerable set of hi-fi kit, viz. a Rega Mira integrated amplifier, Mission 70 speakers plus Chord Anthem 2 interconnect cabling, and the standard computer source offered a basic playback that struggled towards any sort of audiophile standard. Bass was decidedly wooden and one-dimensional while midrange sounded strangled and treble fizzy. Pushing a series of chart CDs through the system, all showing excessive peak limited compression, the vocals screeched with derision.

Switching to the GT40, I took an audible sigh of relief. Bass suddenly put on weight, the playback feeling a real heft in the lower frequency response which also offered more subtlety and integration within the overall presentation instead of the earlier 'tacked on' impression.

Midrange tones conveyed a detail and clarity that was severely lacking in the computer-generated replay. The GT40 not only broadened the soundstage but packed it with newly revealed information, while treble had a new found delicacy. With the chart CDs, the peak limited compression

was successfully toned down to such a degree to make each CD listenable.

Moving to the headphone amp, via a pair of Sennheiser HD650s, I wouldn't exactly describe the GT40 as delicate but I was surprised at the depth of the bass response. The HD650s are inherently no slouch in this department but the GT40 really gives the headphones an extra sledgehammer whack. The GT40 also provides an admirable 3D soundstage.

I tried the phono stage within my reference system and, while it didn't have the definition and transparency of the Icon PS3 (at around £1,400) it certainly wasn't completely shamed either. Upper mids positively shimmered while bass retained a strength and structure to hold any piece of music together with gusto. I'd say this is pretty much the equal of anything below Trichord's fine little Dino, which is no small feat, and considering the price of the ADL GT40, and all its other features, makes a strong case for it.

CONCLUSION

Packed with features and with a pleasing build quality, the Furutech-sourced ADL GT40 USB DAC is a winner on every level. The fact that the GT40 can offer so much within a small chassis will be welcome for those listening to music in cramped areas while the ability to record vinyl to computer via an audiophile accessory will be welcomed by digital fans. Sound quality is also good at the price. Overall, then, this new Furutech box should be investigated by format transfer fans, budget hi-fi users and audiophiles living in restricted spaces.



VERDICT  £
A jack of all trades, this little gadget will be one of the most handy boxes yet devised for some hi-fi addicts!

FURUTECH ADL GT40 £395
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FOR
- feature count
- build quality
- overall sound

AGAINST
- nothing at the price