



All in one

DAP, DAC, amplifier and streaming device, is there anything A&K's new Acro can't do?

Cliff Joseph finds out

Astell&Kern is well known for its range of high-end digital audio players (DAPs) and it also has a range of 'dual-DAC' products aimed at smartphone users. The Acro CA1000T combines both into a single device, providing what the company calls an 'all-in-one head-fi system' that includes a desktop DAP with a powerful built-in DAC and amplifier, plus an impressive range of connectivity and streaming features.

The chunky design of the Acro is pure A&K, with desktop use very much in mind. It's semi-portable, though, as it has a rechargeable battery that lasts for around 11 hours, and you can easily pick it up and move it from room to room when you're at home.

The top panel has a 4.1in touchscreen display, which swivels upwards for easy visibility. This isn't not just for control, however, as it additionally houses a fully functional DAP that employs the same Teraton Alpha technology as found on the company's high-end DAPs. This has 256GB of

internal storage, with a slot for a micro-SD memory card to add more should you need it. It supports Bluetooth (with aptX HD and LDAC), has dual-band wi-fi, Roon compatibility and direct Tidal and Qobuz connection.

The dual-DAC employs two ES9039MPRO chips – a world first, according to A&K – with support for up to 32-bit/768kHz, DSD512 and MQA. The front panel houses 3.5mm and 6.35mm, and balanced 2.5mm and 4.4mm connectors, with four levels of gain for driving a variety of headphones. Around the back are mini-XLR and RCA outputs for external speakers, along with coaxial, optical and RCA inputs for external audio sources and a USB-C port.

Sound quality

The Acro's range of input and output options is pretty impressive, but it's primarily designed as a 'head-fi' system for driving headphones, so I turn to recent *Group Test* winner the Px8 (HFC 500) from Bowers & Wilkins for my listening schedule.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Astell&Kern
Acro CA1000T

ORIGIN
Korea

TYPE
Desktop/portable
DAP/DAC/amp

WEIGHT
980g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
105 x 45 x 156mm

FEATURES
● Outputs: 2.5mm; 3.5mm; 4.4mm and 6.35mm (headphones); mini-XLR; RCA
● Inputs: coaxial; optical; RCA; USB-C
● 32-bit/768kHz; DSD512; MQA

DISTRIBUTOR
Astell&Kern

WEBSITE
astellkern.co.uk

There's something hypnotic about John Cale's *Mercy* – played in lossless format via USB from my MacBook Pro – and the Acro immediately gets the mood, creating an immersive sense of space as the title track's synths and echoing harmonies envelop my head in a shimmering cloud of sound. But there's an undertow of unease, too, as it pulls out the slow drum pulse and captures the mournful, lugubrious tone of Cale's voice.

While I'm not competent to judge Ringo Starr's merits as a drummer, with a 24-bit remaster of *Abbey Road* (released in 2019) the Acro delivers the light, skittering rhythm of the percussion, with drums, snare and cymbals smoothly overlapping as though played on a single instrument. There's a loose, relaxed rhythm to the bass guitar too, and when everything kicks up a gear, the Acro reveals the grit in the chugging guitar chords, and the sharp, glassy sound of Ringo's cymbals as they stab through the air.

The Acro is equally adept with the delicate strings of Max Richter's *On The Nature Of Daylight*. It patiently allows the slow introduction to emerge, bringing out the rich, deep tone of the cellos. Then it steps back and opens up the soundstage as the violins enter, highlighting the contrast between them and the deeper strings. The climax of the piece has even more impact than the original string quartet version, and the Acro manages to keep each set of strings clearly in focus as the orchestra surges forwards, before slowly winding down and fading away.

Conclusion

Of course, not everyone will need a multi-purpose DAP/DAC combo such as the Acro CA1000T, especially at this price. But, for those who enjoy the high-quality sound of Astell&Kern's DAPs, this is a tempting all-in-one system that will also work well as part of a larger hi-fi setup ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** DAP/DAC combo with impressive sound quality; connectivity

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Expensive; no accessories

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An impressive all-in-one headphone system

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL

