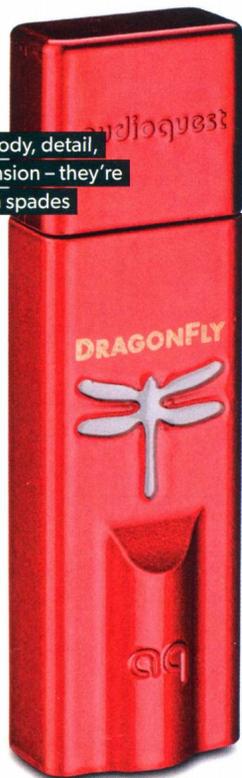


# BEST USB DAC £100+

## AUDIOQUEST DRAGONFLY RED £170



**Almost double the** price of the DragonFly Black and apparently only a coat of red paint to show for it - the case for the Red doesn't look so strong. Especially when you consider that it doesn't offer any more features or raise that 96kHz sampling rate limit any higher. Why pay more?

Audioquest points to a number of upgrades for the Red over the Black: a more advanced DAC and headphone amp for starters, plus a "bit-perfect digital volume control contained on the DAC chip itself" that's apparently a big improvement on the analogue volume control in the Black. A higher-output voltage (2.1v compared with the Black's 1.2v) makes it more suitable for driving demanding headphones, too. The Red, like the Black v1.5, also works with smartphones and tablets.

While none of that sounds particularly Earth-shattering, there is good news: the DragonFly Red does sound better than the Black. Loads better.

**"Even low-res streams get a hefty improvement in detail, definition and dynamics"**

The first thing you notice when going from one to the other is the Red's sonic authority. This is partly in the form of overall bass extension, but is also expressed in the extra body given to every single note. There's a three-dimensional solidity and texture to every sound that makes the Black sound flat by comparison (even though it's undeniably accomplished in its own right and at its own price).

### Back to nature

As well as being fuller-bodied, each of these notes also contains a good deal more detail. Combined with excellent low-level dynamics, this means that everything has a more natural, subtle and expressive sound.

And if you want to take things back to basics and are wondering whether a DAC such as this will make a difference to your daily dose of Spotify, allow us to confirm it will. Even these comparatively low-res streams get a hefty improvement in the detail, definition and dynamism departments, and they're as strong a case for the Red over the Black as the 24-bit stuff.

In the end the case for the Red turns out to be a strong one. It takes all the positives of the Black and adds an extra dollop of sound quality. It's a superb buy.