

## ■ AudioQuest DragonFly Red £169

**So, what does** AudioQuest's considerably pricier USB DAC offer that the soundKey doesn't? Not much in the way of bulk for your buck, certainly. It also can't get above 24-bit/96kHz in terms of file support.

But the DragonFly Red has an advanced DAC and headphone amp, plus "bit-perfect digital volume control contained on the DAC chip itself". A voltage output of 2.1v makes driving demanding headphones easy, too. Indeed, the AudioQuest gets you not so much as a step but a leg up in performance. More than enough to justify its price tag? You bet.

There's real sonic weight to the Red's delivery. This is partly in the form of bass extension, but also in the extra body given to each and every note. There's three-dimensionality, solidity and texture here. Full-bodied and detailed, with excellent low-level dynamics, the Red is a natural, subtle and expressive listen.

It's also well organised. A 24-bit file of Radiohead's *Burn The Witch* is fully

controlled, allowing you to pick out and admire every thread of the gloriously complicated arrangement. The whole track builds, becoming ever more frantic and layered, and when it suddenly ends, you feel you've just experienced something genuinely dramatic. There's little of this drama through lesser DACs.

### **The lows reach new highs**

Even comparatively low-res streams (from Spotify, for example) get a hefty improvement in the detail, definition and dynamic departments - as strong a case for the Red as the 24-bit stuff.

The fact that the Red can work with Android (check your handset can output audio over USB) and Apple smartphones (using Apple's camera adapter) in addition to laptops and computers means this supremely compact and convenient device can be taken anywhere for an immediate musical boost.

Having the DragonFly logo light up in different colours to tell you the file format it's handling remains an elegant



**WHAT HI\*FI?**

**BEST DAC  
£150-£300**

If you didn't think superb sound and extreme portability could go together, listen to this

and instant method of delivering mind-easing information, too.

We have some reservations about the hardness of that red finish - Audioquest provides a pouch as a tacit admission of its vulnerability - but in every other respect the DragonFly Red is a pretty perfect computer (or smartphone) music upgrade - as three Awards attest.