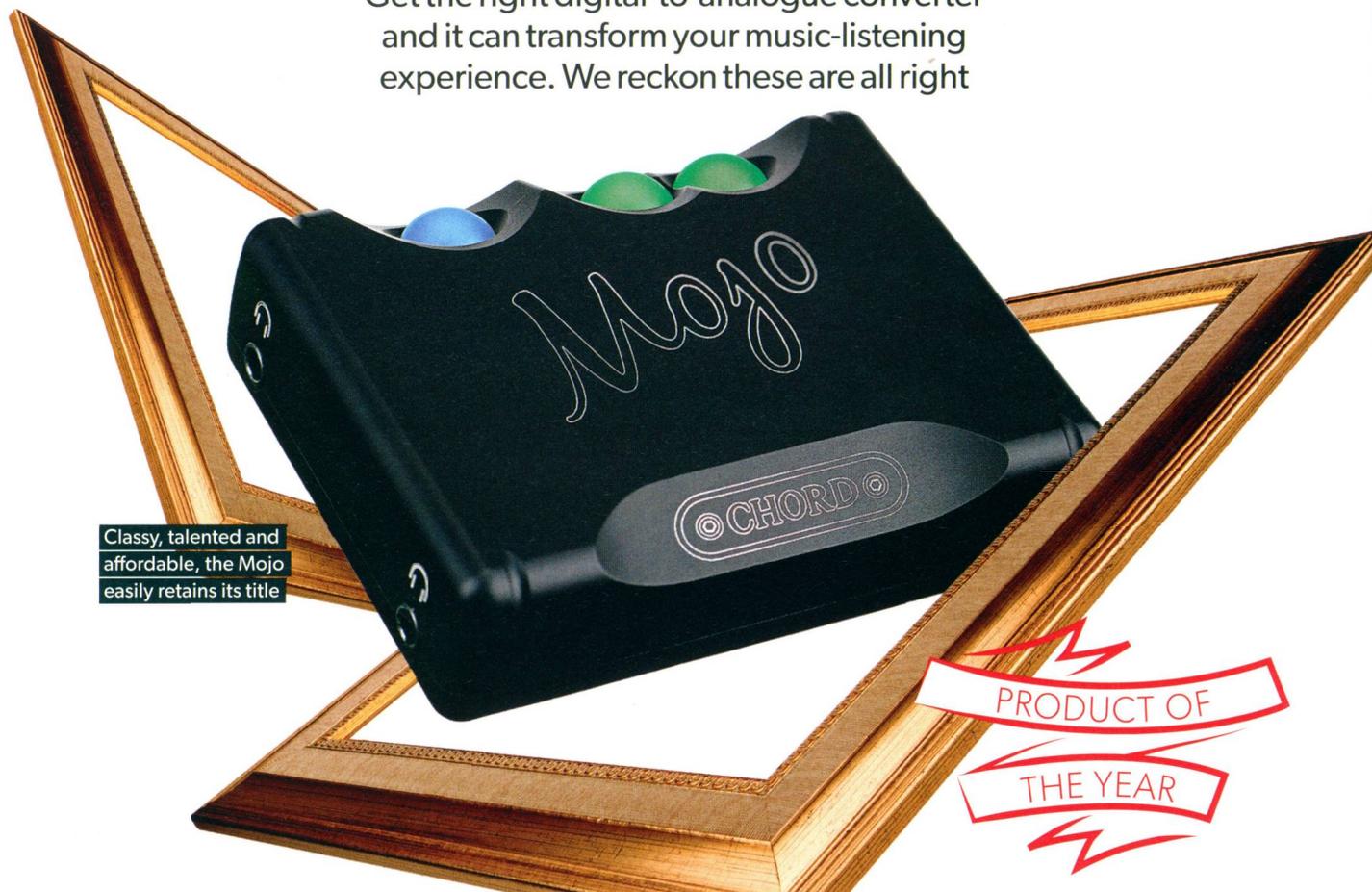


DACs

Get the right digital-to-analogue converter and it can transform your music-listening experience. We reckon these are all right



Classy, talented and affordable, the Mojo easily retains its title

PRODUCT OF

THE YEAR

BEST DAC UNDER £500

CHORD MOJO £400



A year on and the Mojo retains its Product of the Year title. We'd like to say it had a tough battle but the truth is, despite a whole raft of new competition, this Chord never came close to getting beaten. It remains the star performer among sub-£500 DACs.

Unlike most of its rivals, Chord has long refused to use off-the-shelf DAC chips inside its converters. Instead, the company's digital products feature powerful programmable processors loaded with proprietary software to do the job. In our experience it's an approach that really works.

There's no display as such, but the power button lights up in different colours depending on the sampling rate of the input signal. It goes red for 44.1kHz, green for 96kHz all the way to pink for DSD. Similarly, the colour of the lighting behind the volume buttons changes according to level. All the different colours prove a little confusing at first, but given a little time it becomes second nature.

The Mojo is a small unit, with a footprint barely larger than a credit card, yet Chord has found space for a good range of connections. There's (micro) USB, optical and coax, though the latter takes the form of a 3.5mm jack rather than the usual RCA or BNC connection. You won't find any source selector - the inputs are auto-sensing, with USB taking priority, followed by coax. Outputs are limited to a pair of 3.5mm jacks. While these obviously lend themselves to headphones we've had great results using 3.5mm-to-RCA interconnects to connect the Mojo to our reference hi-fi system.

This DAC's build quality is terrific. Thanks in part to the minimal detailing, the Mojo feels like a solid chunk of metal. Its aircraft-grade aluminium casing is beautifully machined and finished to a high standard.

Once up and running, this a fabulous performer. We take a listen to Stevie Wonder's masterpiece *Innervisions* (on DSD), and are gripped from the unmistakable opening bars of *Too High* right through to the end of the album. There's plenty of detail here, and the kind of insight into the recording that little under a grand can match, let alone better.

An effective personal organiser

But it's not the excellent resolution that impresses us most. It's the Mojo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive and musical whole that makes it stand out from the competition. It delivers the hard-charging rhythm track of *Higher Ground* brilliantly, communicating the song's unstoppable momentum with real enthusiasm.

A move on to Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises* (24-bit/192kHz) reveals a surefooted handling of dynamics. The Mojo can convey power and scale when the music demands, but also has the finesse to make the most of the more subtle passages. Poor recordings (and sources) will be easy to spot, but this DAC won't go out of its way to be nasty.

The Mojo continues to set standards others can't match. It offers a huge proportion of the performance of Chord's pricier offerings at a fraction of the cost. Even at £400 we consider it a bargain.