

Maverick Audio - TubeMagic D2 DAC



HIGH END PERFORMANCE. Low end price

By Doug Waters and David Massarik

We recently evaluated a production version of the (Chinese sourced) Maverick Audio TubeMagic D2 Digital-Analog-Converter [DAC] and came away with some distinct impressions.

To test and evaluate the pre-sales experience, we devised several basic pre-purchase questions that any ordinary purchaser might have and used the Maverick Audio web site contact page to submit our questions. Most inquiries were answered within 24 hours in the form of a clearly written, complete response from Ryan, a company principal. Following up to the excellent initial response, we tested several additional technical questions about usage of the D2 DAC. Specifically, we inquired: “Such that the D2 has no IR remote capability, how might I integrate the unit into the rest of my setup?” Again, a response with suggests involving the hardware capabilities of the D2 was quickly received: “The D2 offers a physical switch-power button is a that stays "on" when pressed and the input selector is also a physical selection switch. You have the option of leaving "on" button in the ON position and the input selector switch set to BNC and then use an IR remote to power on and off a ‘master’ type power center ---with the D2 plugged in that.” Very knowledgeable.

	TubeMagic D2
Digital inputs	x4
Coaxial	x2 up to 24bit/96Khz
Optical	x1 up to 24bit/96Khz
USB	x1 up to 24bit/96Khz
Bit-perfect USB	Yes
Analog inputs	No
Analog output	x1
Tube Pre-out	x1
Volume control	No
Headphone Amp	No
DAC chip	AD1955
OpAmp	BurrBrown OPA2604 x3
S/N ratio for Analog output	>117db
S/N ratio for Tube Pre-out	>100db

We purchased a D2 DAC with the upgraded GE5670W tubes at list price (\$249.00). The unit was shipped from a Florida address rather than China, so it arrived quickly and in perfect shape.



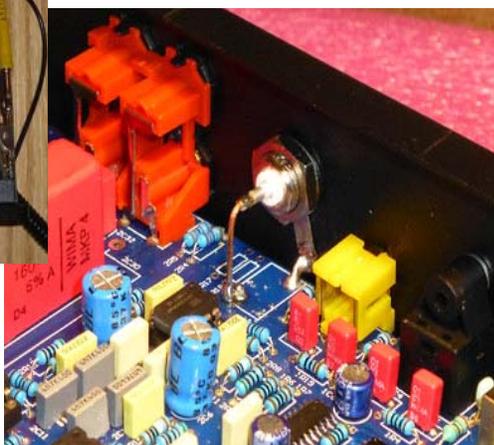
For testing purposes, we plugged the D2 into a 2 channel listening setup consisting of: 1 Parasound 2100 preamp and two Parasound HCA-1000A amps biamping a pair of Magnepan 1.6QR speakers. Using various audio files stored on our music server which connects (via USB 2.0) to a Firestone Bravo SPDIF reclocker (spec'd at 50ps jitter) which in turn connects to D2 DAC device (via a RCA to BNC cable). In addition to the BNC input, the D2 also supports USB, TOSLINK optical, and RCA Coax inputs.

Sound output from the D2 was completely clear, 3D-like, and distortion free. We also compared the tube outputs to the normal solid state outputs of the D2 and found the difference to be very subtle. Over time, we realized the tube output sounds perceptibly more pleasant and enjoyable over long listening sessions ---not a dramatic difference in sound, but rather one of "comfort".

As part of our technical evaluation, we observed that the D2 came with a relatively low-end-looking power cord. Using our Greenlee GT-16 tester, we noticed that the OEM D2 power cord was spitting out significant power line noise, indicating very poor shielding.

We swapped out the original power cord for a Volex 17660 (\$10) cord. The 17660 is very well made and well shielded power cord. Retesting with the Greenlee GT-16 proved the power-line noise eliminated and did make a difference in the sound quality of the D2.

We opened the D2 DAC to evaluate the individual components and made an additional observation:



The BNC connectors on the back of the D2 appear to be the 50 ohm variety (compare 75 ohm pictured on the left, 50 ohm on the right).



For SPDIF ideally 75 ohm connectors are used to minimize "reflections" of the signal (which can, if large enough, introduce sound quality robbing jitter errors). We consider it important to maintain a 75 ohm connection all the way thru the signal path which includes the jacks, plugs and cable.

The Maverick Audio D2 DAC is a bargain at \$249. The D2 will be a significant upgrade to your system if you are not already using a standalone DAC and will bring your system closer to audiophile high-end levels for a minor investment. For a minimal additional cost, we recommend an upgrade to the power cord and BNC connector (if you are using the BNC connector) to further upgrade your sound and listening pleasure. *DW/DM*

