

AudioQuest

DragonFly Black & DragonFly Red USB/headphone amp



The jump in terms of performance when the DragonFly is used is enormous

Different strokes

The key difference between these models and their predecessors is that they now communicate via a custom interface from a company called Microchip. This is a much more energy-efficient design – with input from Gordon Rankin who is one of the leading lights of USB audio – which allows the DACs to be connected to phones and tablets.

While the ESS Sabre is capable of decoding a wide variety of formats, in the DragonFly it is set up to run as a USB1 device and is limited handling 24-bit/96kHz PCM files.

The combination of DragonFly Black and a decent pair of in-ear monitors is enough to keep most dedicated audio players honest. Use the Red and you can drive more demanding headphones. Power consumption increases with a DragonFly attached, but the drain on battery life is not severe in my tests.

Ch ch ch changes....

The changes that allow the latest DragonFly models to work on the move mean that these models are comfortably the best iteration yet. For earphone users, the Black is an extremely cost effective way of boosting the performance of a mobile phone while the Red is an impressively compact means of driving more challenging headphones. In both cases, they represent exceptional value for money. **ES**