

# Gato Audio DIA-250 Integrated Amplifier with DAC

BY JAMPAL ON 20/09/2013

## Review Equipment:

- **Digital Source:** FLAC files via Squeezebox and USB input
- **Analogue Source:** Acoustic Solid 111, Audio Note Arm 1 and Benz Glider
- **Phono Stage:** Puresound T10 step up transformer and Puresound P10 phono amp.
- **Speakers:** Triangle Antal ESw and [Acoustic Energy 305](#)



The truth is I've been struggling to write this review, the problem is not that I don't like it, or that I want to phrase any of its shortcomings carefully; no, the problem is that I am struggling to put into words the unique sound this amp produces. I don't say "unique" lightly. And I don't say it in a negative way either. I've heard a lot of amps since we started reviewing kit, the ones I liked you can read about here, the ones I didn't like were returned un-reviewed. But it's fair to say that of the ones I liked it would often be hard to pick them blind. Certainly there are differences, but an identifiable character? Not often. However where the Gato is concerned I think I could take a double blind test with this and I reckon I could pick it from the crowd. Let me (try to) explain why...

First things first, the amp is a **class D** unit, with twin precision switching MOSFETs and discrete power supplies for each stage. For analogue signals there are **2 line level** inputs and a **balanced input**. On the digital front you have **USB** (which allows streaming direct from an Apple iPod), **Optical and RCA** to choose from. Oh and you have **250Watts** on tap into an 8ohm load, which is sufficient to say the least!



The gorgeous aluminium chassis comes with a choice of tops (all in piano gloss finishes) wood, black and white. It is sexy! Properly hot in fact. The quality of everything from the packaging to the wonderful clear display is absolutely first class. Attention to detail is obviously a high priority for the Danish manufacturer. It shows in every department, even the remote control is a well laid out aluminium lozenge of tactile quality.

At **£2690.00**, with a high quality up-sampling DAC built in it already represents huge value even before we get to it's real strength, the sound quality!

That sound quality I am struggling to put into words is subtle, not something that detracts from the music, in fact it enhances it. The best I can do is to say it puts me in mind of the fluid nature of the T1000 from Terminator 2. It's as if every note is coated in silicone, the music slides out of the speakers and slips into your ears. Each note or sound is individually parcelled in slippery goodness. Some would say the Gato is smooth but that would be an understatement. The very excellent [Sonneteer Orton](#) is smooth (among other good things), but this takes smoothness to another level. It's not class D it's class Teflon.

It is also silent, of course being class D helps in this area, there is real silence and space between notes. And unlike other class D amps I've heard it doesn't trip over itself with complex pieces. [Stevie Ray Vaughan's Scuttle Buttin](#) often sorts the men from the boys in this department, but streaming a flac into the RCA input left no note undefined. And unlike most class D amps I've heard there isn't the usual dryness to the sound. There's a touch of warmth here, it's a full bodied sound without sacrificing detail. I wouldn't call it clinical, but it has revealed a few new layers in some very familiar recordings – detail is not lacking in any way.



Of course there has to be a down-side. But I've really struggled to find it. There is perhaps a touch of leanness in some voices, but only really compared to my valve amps and really I hesitate to mention it as this is by far the most rounded and natural sounding Class D amp I've heard.

The Gato delivers a broad and high sound-stage too. Images are well defined and I really felt I could tell where Neil Diamond was sitting when the great timbre of his voice singing Oh Mary was revealed.

Bass is well defined and controlled, no bloom, I've heard deeper octaves from certain tracks, but actually only with amps that were perhaps compromised or held back by slightly blown bass. Orbital's [Dwr Budr](#) plumbs depths few other tracks dare tread and I certainly didn't feel short changed with the Gato powering my Triangle Antals or my Acoustic Energy 305s.

Could I live with one? H000 yes! Do I want one? Hell yes! As a reviewer I really need a pre-power set up so that I can review pre amps and power amps individually in a familiar system. If it weren't for that I'd be contacting Steve at [Audio Emotion](#) to do a deal. It's hugely practical, has huge WAF (Wife acceptance factor), has power enough to drive almost any transducer and sounds utterly stunning. This is an uncommonly good bit of kit. Some companies are destined to succeed, even in this tough climate for HiFi. Gato has to be one such company.

What another glowing review? Unavoidable in this instance chaps, it's too good. I really don't want to send it back. So much so I've asked Steve to send it back to me so that some friends can hear it when they come down in a couple of weeks.

Discuss the review [here](#).

