

Gold Note DS10 Streamer/DAC/Pre-amplifier/Headphone Amp

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Fresh out of Florence, Gold Note's new Streamer/DAC aims to bring versatility and sophistication to your digital setup. John Scott sets out to see if it succeeds in this, the first English language review of this product.

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 English

CHECK OUT ULTIMATE STREAM'S PORTFOLIO



SEARCH HIFI PIG



Italian high-end audio manufacturer Gold Note has already made a name for itself with its stylish range of turntables and loudspeakers. Gold Note has also developed a range of digital products including the flagship DS1000 DAC/streamer and the IS1000 integrated amplifier/DAC/streamer. Their latest product the DS10 takes the expertise used in designing these units and aims to provide a smaller high-quality single-box streaming solution for those of us who like to use digital files and streaming services as the heart of our music library.

UNBOXING, BUILD AND SET UP

The DS10 arrived in a standard brown shipping box secured by Gold Note-branded tape. On opening the box, the D10 was wrapped in a black fabric branded pouch which was a nice touch and is useful if you find yourself needing to put the unit into storage for any time. Polyurethane end cheeks provided protection for any slight bumps that might be encountered during shipping and the DS10 was accompanied in the box by a remote control, a wifi antenna, a Bluetooth antenna, an ethernet cable, a

power chord and an instruction manual.

Comprehensive connectivity is at the heart of the DS10. The rear panel is well laid out; space is at a premium but the panel doesn't look or feel cluttered at all. Both RCA and balanced XLR outputs are provided and there is a full range of inputs including Ethernet, USB A, AES/EBU, S/PDIF, USB B and 2 optical Toslink connectors. Additionally, there is a standard IEC power connector, connections for the wifi and Bluetooth antennae and a connector for an optional external power supply.



In contrast to the rear panel, the front of the DS10 is pleasingly minimalistic. At the right-hand side of the unit is what Gold Note describe as an SKC – Single Knob Control. Off-centre to the left of the panel is a 2.8" TFT display and to the left of this is a small power/stand by LED, an IR receiver for the remote control and a 6.3mm headphone jack.



Build quality of the DS10 is pleasingly solid. The unit's chassis is machined from solid aluminium which Gold Note claims guarantees low-frequency resonance and magnetic shielding. The design of the casing incorporates a stylish air vent design which takes its inspiration from the company's PH10 phono stage. The DS10 is available in black, silver or champagne gold. I was supplied with the black version which would probably be my favoured option. It's a simple yet stylishly attractive box that will sit happily beside your other components, looking good while not attracting too much attention to itself.



Given the range of connections available, the initial setup was fairly straightforward. I opted to start with an ethernet connection from my Synology DS216+ NAS drive and the RCA outputs to my Etalon SuprA amplifier. The DS10 is turned on by a single press of the SCK knob which then activates the display. Jogging the SCK to the left or the right then circles the display through the various input options. Once "Network" appears, a press of the SCK confirms that as your chosen input and you are good to go. This setup functionality can also be carried out by pressing buttons on the remote control if desired. It's a fairly intuitive system and doesn't take long to get used to.

During the course of the review, I also used the DS10 wirelessly and via Bluetooth – see below for further details.

Currently, the DS10 uses an off the shelf control app from Mconnect. It's an app I have



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used before and enjoyed using. Like all streamer apps, it takes a bit of getting used to but before long I had mastered navigating my digital library and was happily queueing up playlists. It is also possible to access online streaming services from Qobuz, Tidal and Deezer via the app; logging into my Qobuz account took a matter of seconds. By the way, if you are a Tidal subscriber, you'll be pleased to hear that the DS10 is MQA compatible. Gold Note has announced that it plans to release their own proprietary control app in the near future but this was not available at the time of review.



As a Roon user, I was quite excited to see that the DS10 was described on both the Roon and Gold Note websites as being Roon Ready. This would mean that the DS10 would be fully functional via my Roon Nucleus+ and the Roon Control app on my iPad. I fired up the Roon app and was slightly surprised to see that the DS 10 was identified by Roon as the Gold Note IS1000 integrated amplifier/streamer. Fortunately, this did not prevent me from being able to control the DS10 via Roon. The only apparent lack of functionality was that DSD files were downsampled to PCM rather than being played natively. This was slightly annoying but not really a huge issue. When I contacted Roon and Gold Note about this, they both confirmed that the Roon Ready certification process was not yet complete for the DS10. Neither company were able to give me a date for completion.

SOUND QUALITY

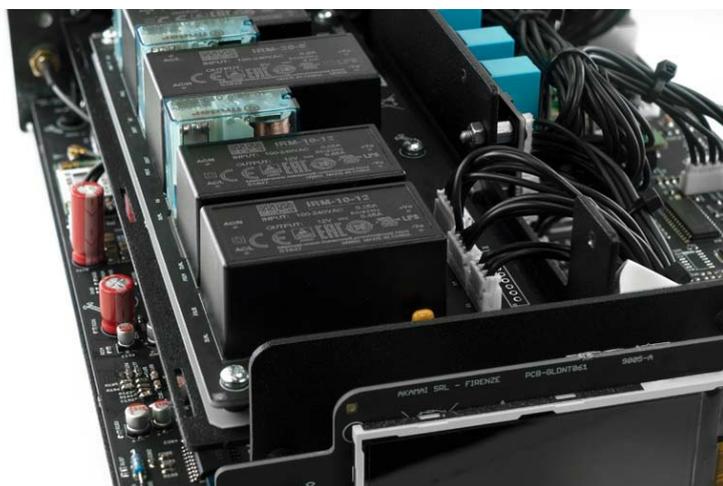
As the DS10 was new out of the box, I gave it a couple of days to run in before attempting any critical listening; first impressions were, however, very encouraging. When I eventually sat down to spend some serious time with the DS10 I was almost immediately struck by how engaging it sounded. Pulling out an old favourite, and one that often starts off my review listening sessions, John Martyn's Solid Air, was like meeting up with an old friend. Danny Thompson's bass was woody and resonant, Tristan Fry's vibraphone shimmered just like it should and Tony Coe's saxophone was breathy and smooth. Martyn's vocal was revealed to be in its own reverberate space but was seamlessly integrated into the other musicians' performances.





To something completely different: Lang Lang's recording of George Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue from his New York Rhapsody album streamed from Qobuz. This is a duet performance with Herbie Hancock accompanied by the London Symphony Orchestra recorded at Abbey Road and it's a big, big performance. The DS10 spread the orchestra across the front of my listening room and did a great job at separating out Lang Lang's and Herbie's individual pianos, allowing the interplay between them to really shine.

Changing the mood again, Amy Rigby's 18 Again veers from power pop to cod-country ballad and the DS10 had my foot tapping along from the get-go. Before I knew it, an hour had simply flown by.



So far, so (very) good; the DS10 left me happy with anything I threw at it. Then about two weeks into my time with the unit, Gold Note announced a firmware update. This provides three elements of DAC filtering – Equalisation Curve (a low-pass filter), De-emphasis Curve (a high-pass filter) and DAC Power. Each of these is individually adjustable which provides a total of an eye-watering 192 possible combinations. Dear Reader, I didn't try them all. My experimentation did show, however, that it is possible to tweak the sound of the DS10 to suit your individual preferences. Three presets can be customised and stored. Fortunately, I found that I was more than happy with the DS10 in its default, non-customised setting.

Moving away from the ethernet connection to wifi, I found the connection to be stable – no dropouts at all during the time I used it – and no discernible change in sound quality. Similarly, using Bluetooth connection to my phone I was able to stream tracks downloaded from Qobuz and was very impressed with how they sounded. It's not a



function I could see myself using very often but useful when friends drop round and want to play you their new discoveries.



CONCLUSION

The DS10 is an attractive, solidly-built, flexible and capable streaming solution. Once installed in your hifi system I can't imagine that you would be in any hurry at all to move it on and it, therefore, represents a solid investment. Its default sound is excellent and there is the ability to tailor this should you desire. Gold Note claims that performance can be further enhanced by the addition of an external power supply. This was not available at the time of my review but it is certainly something that I would be keen to try. As it stands though, I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent with the Gold Note DS10 and it is highly recommended.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Minimalist design and pleasing build quality.

Sound Quality: Engaging, and tweakable sound.

Value For Money: Solid investment.

Pros: A stylish and solid DAC/Streamer solution. Multi-functioning; can perform as a steamer, a stand-alone DAC and a preamplifier. Excellent sound quality.

Cons: Not (yet) entirely Roon ready. The degree of DAC customisation is possibly a little over the top.

Price: €2490



John Scott

Specifications

MAIN FEATURES: D/A Converter AKM AK4493 PCM up to 32bit/768kHz & DSD512 native and DoP, Streamer Network Player PCM and DSD

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DIMENSIONS: 200mm W, 80mm H, 260mm D

WEIGHT: 4kg

FINISHES: Case: Brushed Aluminium, Black or Silver or Gold

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 20Hz-20kHz +/-0.1dB

THD – TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION: 0.001% max

SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO: -125dB

DYNAMIC RANGE: 120dB

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE: 50ohm

PREAMP STAGE VOLUME CONTROL: Enabled/disabled by remote

POWER: Mains supply: 100V to 240V, 50/60Hz. Multiple Transformer proprietary power supply

Power consumption: 30W

DIGITAL INPUTS:

1 Ethernet LAN & Wi-Fi DSD64 (DoP)

Resolution: PCM up to 24bit/192kHz

1x RCA S/PDIF coaxial PCM asynchronous up to 24bit/192kHz

2x TOS-optical PCM asynchronous up to 24bit/192kHz

1x COAX asynchronous up to 24bit/192kHz

1x AES/EBU balanced PCM asynchronous up to 24bit/192kHz

1 x USB-B asynchronous native and up to DSD512 and PCM up to 32bit/384kHz

1x USB-A port to feed USB flash memories, FAT32/NTFS formatted playing DSD64 and PCM up to 24bit/192kHz

1x USB-B asynchronous native up to DSD512 and PCM up to 32bit/384kHz

AUDIO OUTPUTS: Line output level (fixed): stereo RCA @ 1Volt and balanced XLR @ 4Volt

CONNECTIVITY: LAN/WLAN (WiFi): 802.11b/g via RJ45 10/100Mbps socket. Bluetooth 5.0

SUPPORTED AUDIO FORMATS (NETWORK): AIFF (.aif, .aiff, .aifc). ALAC, WAV (.wav) packed/unpacked, FLAC, MP3, DSF, DFF, Apple Lossless, OGG, Monkey Media.

SUPPORTED MEDIA SERVERS: All UPnP / DLNA / Roon

REMOTE CONTROL: Included

CONTROL APP: Available for iOS and Android

