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JADIS JS2 SL DAC

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JADIS JS2 SL DAC REVIEW

JS2 SL is the latest one-box DAC from the illustrious French brand JADIS. Stuart takes a listen to this 10,900 Euro DAC for HiFi PiG.



From a stylistically speaking perspective, French brand JADIS has to be one of my favourite brands in the

audio world. Their gold and chrome finishing is not going to be to everyone's taste, but, like their German counterparts Burmester, they manage to tread the fine line between tasteful bling and ostentatious flashiness with aplomb. Ordinarily, I like my HiFi to be fairly conservative (*if you take the pink DAC, amps and mains filters out of the equation*) but I'd most certainly find room on our altar to the audio gods for this highly polished bauble of HiFi exquisiteness. It is a rather lovely thing to behold and hold.

The packaging of the JS2 SL DAC is very good and in the box you get the DAC, a handbook, and a power cord. Nothing superfluous and those who think flashy packing is overkill will be satisfied here. The ample but "anything but shouty" packaging has the unit itself in a plastic bag and it's held in place within the box by purpose-made expanded foam to make sure nothing rattles about in transit. Picking the DAC up and out of the box is a nice experience – the cool, heavy metal of the DAC feels purposeful and luxurious. Get the DAC out of the bag and that feeling of quality continues. The single toggle switch on the front left of the J2 SL feels nice and the input sector knob on the right moves into place with a satisfying clunk. You do get a series of LEDs to let you know what's happening with regards to bit-rate etc, but that's pretty much it on the front of the DAC as far as controls go... and there's no remote control because there is no need for one. The LEDs I mentioned all have different colours depending on what they are telling you and all this is shown clearly in the well-written and simple-to-follow manual.



The tubes (*a quad of ECC82s*) of the fully balanced design tube stage in the JS2 are all factory-fitted and are hidden away within the DAC itself so there's no fear of little fingers and paws getting burned should they become too inquisitive.

The chip used in the JS2 SL DAC is the Sabre ES9038PRO using 32-bit Hyperstream technology.




Around the back you have the SPDIF coaxial input, AES/EBU XLR input, TOSLINK optical connector, USB B Input to connect to your computer/streamer and then both balanced XLR and unbalanced RCAs are available. An AC input and switch complete the back panel of the JADIS JS2 SI

The files the DAC will handle are PCM from 44.1 to 384kHz and DSD from 64 to 256 so pretty much all bases are covered there. I almost exclusively use USB now and did so throughout this review.




All in all the JADIS is a well-packed and feature-packed DAC without getting into the whole palaver of this filter slope or that filter slope. You get what you are given and if you like it then that should be sufficient. I have to say, of all the DACS we've owned over the years, I have always found a filter that pleases and left it at that without a second thought – the JADIS takes this (*inconvenient*) convenience out of the equation and that's one less step you have to take in getting you closer to the tunes you want to play – less hassle, more music! Some might prefer the ability to tinker, but that's going to be down personal choice and what kind of music lover you are. Whatever, the JADIS J2S certainly looks the part and shouts luxury without screaming it.



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SET UP

Plug it into the relevant source (in my case an Auralic Streamer), plug it into the power, connect to your preamplifier (there's no onboard pre-section *on this DAC*) and Robert's your Mother's brother...music. Controls such as they are are just the source knob which will be pretty much permanently set at USB for the purposes of this review and the on-off toggle. Simplicity is the key with the JS2 SL DAC and this simplicity will appeal to those looking to have a simple and intuitive digital setup. There's no filters to choose from, so fanning about with any eq settings or anything – the (*rather lovely*) box arrives, you unbox it, wipe the fingerprints off it, put it on your rack, wire it up, turn it on, wipe off the fingerprints again, and then you can sit back and enjoy your tunes without having to touch the unit other than to change the source – should you ever need to – and so the fingerprint issue becomes no issue.

JADIS JS2 SL DAC SOUND QUALITY

So we know the J2S looks the part and handles all the files we could ever hope to encounter, it's also a doddle to set up (plug and play) and get playing music, but how does that music sound?

As I tend to do these days when reviewing kit, I write down my broad expectations of a product before listening. I do this to help me focus on specifics throughout the note-making process and to make clear in my own mind any expectation bias I may have – as a reader, being aware of these may help you get more from the review. So, from this tube-based DAC my expectation was a rather laidback and less incisive sound, particularly in the top end, than I might expect from, say, the LEEMA LIBRA DAC we have.

Let's see...

All the music played whilst testing the JADIS JS2 were streamed from our NAS via our Auralic streamer and then the DAC went out into the analogue input (*via XLR*) to LEEMA pre bypassing its DAC stage.

The first thing that sprang to mind was that this DAC is indeed a little softer sounding than the one inside the LEEMA Libra. The Libra has been in the main system for a while now and it was put there because its DAC section is so incisive and unforgivingly true to the source. This detail and incisiveness can come across as being a touch too much (*too clinical*) in the tops for some, but as a reviewing tool, the Libra is a superb bit of analytical kit. The first album I put on was Setting Sons by The Jam and that softer and more accessible sound was immediate. I still think there is plenty of detail there (I wasn't really listening very intently to this album as it was just what I happened across first when I was setting the DAC up) but there's no doubt that there's a more rounded and undemanding sound from the JADIS. I'm speaking in really broad terms here as I wasn't really in "review mode" when listening initially but for me, the JADIS allowed me to just sit down and listen to a record without feeling like I was being overwhelmed with information, but, by the same token, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and immediately relaxed and fell into listening to this absolute belter of a record from my teens – though I must confess to being something of an amateur The Jam fan when compared to Jonathan at Music First Audio. Sadly, around the time I was listening to this it was announced that the drummer from The Jam, Rick Buckler had died. I think it's quite telling when you plug in a new bit of kit into a system you know very well and it immediately just clicks into place – no warm-up, no burn-in, no "getting used to the new sound", just an immediate sense of "this sounds kinda nice and right". Had this been a demonstration in a shop and had I been in the market for a DAC at this price I'd have been sold after just this album, though the aesthetics of this DAC would suggest to me that you really ought to have a full JADIS system for it to work (aesthetically) and give the full (*slightly*) blingtastic golden JADIS effect. Eton Rifles has a bit of electric organ stabbing at the very end and fairly well back in the mix which I'd not heard before, despite having heard this record a gazillion times – don't know if that's just because I was listening without listening that I noticed it or what...



Anyway, down to some proper listening.

In the world of HiFi reviews, the word softer sounding (*as I've used above*) might suggest that a product is a bit "pipe and slippers", boring, and lacking incisive detail, but I can say hand on heart that this is not how I would describe this DAC. Yes, the sound is easy to get on with and enjoy from the off, but not once in the listening experience did I feel I was missing anything in the music I was listening to. What I did find was that

with tracks that are a bit topky in themselves, the JADIS made things a little easier to listen to than the LEEMA. Perhaps the tops have been de-emphasised with this DAC and the presence band pushed a little – probably the kind of “filter” tone I would have chosen for everyday listening anyway, had I been given the option, and one that I think has been designed to appeal to a broader audience – not a daft move at all by this French brand! I thought that this line on the JADIS website about the DAC was pretty telling “...to ensure that technological advances and high musicality coincide”. To my mind, technological advances in home audio are only really useful and relevant if they enhance the musical experience when you sit down to listen – you may have the most resolving bit of kit in the world, but if it rips your ears off when you listen to music on it then it’s not really an advancement at all and proof to me that systems that are uber-resolving don’t necessarily translate into higher listener enjoyment. If I was to be asked for a word to describe this DAC from my very first listening experiences, I would say it was quite analogue sounding – yeh, I know!



Psy Trance is a great test for kit and for my money Juno Reactor, whose first single I remember playing out a fair bit back in early 90s, is pretty much the leading exponent of this genre, and I expect folk will pick up on this at shows in the near future given that Psy is getting a fair bit of play nowadays – whodathunkit? Anyway, I really like this genre as it has LOADS going on, is very dynamic, and it takes a good system to get across the slam and energy, but also the smaller sonic details that are trademarks of this style of music. The Golden Sun (Remixed) is the album I chose and if you haven’t heard it, you ought to give it a go. What I want this DAC to do is as outlined above; to get the full audio experience over to the listener...and the JADIS does a brilliant job at this. The bass kick is there throughout and you are able to hear whether it is affected and filtered pretty easily, but there is also swads of detail present throughout the album and on tunes such as Invisible (Ritmo Remix) the side chain compression (*I think*) brings that ducking bass across very dynamically. This tune starts off with some (*presumably*) sampled sitars and they can sound harsh sometimes, but in this system the JADIS doesn’t make it sound harsh, but nor does it sound dull and lifeless – a happy medium, perhaps? There is everything there in the recording and the sound staging is spectacular. “Indian” drums (*sorry, I don’t know what they are called*) cut through the mix, as does the vocal sample, suggesting that the JADIS is doing a great job at feeding the preamplifier with an analogue signal that is “complete”. Nothing is missing from the mix at all and there is that mix here of edge-of-your-seat

excitement combined with an easy-feeling kind of listen – nothing is shouting out for attention. The new bassline that comes in at around 5 minutes also cuts through when it should. Overall the sound is layered and three-dimensional without feeling overly etched into the soundstage – again, I’m reaching for the word “organic”. Tempest comes on after and you basically get more of the same.

Ansifa Letyago’s Rhythm Tension on Kompakt is a track that does what it says on the tin – it builds tension and if you weren’t aware, the whole thing about Techno in a “live” setting is to create tension and release in the music. The JADIS allows this to come across very well and everything appears in the mix as it should. The driving open hi-hat sounds don’t get lost in the mix, but are not as “spiky” as I’ve heard before and specifically with our Leema DAC. Perhaps we are losing a little in ultimate top-end detail here or perhaps the presentation is just a little more relaxed with the JADIS. Whatever, the DAC works with this kind of music well and I’d be very happy to slot this into a system – VEFRY HAPPY! In some ways, the JADIS is like the [LAB 12 DAC](#) that we have and love and this is interesting in that both have valve stages in them. I know it’s a cliché to suggest that valves add a degree of warmth to the situation, but I do think this is the case with both the LAB 12 and the JADIS DAC – both allow for long listening sessions without fatigue, but maybe you lose in having just a little bit of the top end bite (*edginess*) lost, but then remember, you might well prefer that kind of presentation over an analytical and “digital” approach. Yes, I know I’m suggesting in that last phrase that the JADIS is a bit analogue sounding, but I do think that’s the case with the JADIS DAC in that it doesn’t have a digital brittleness (another cliché, perhaps) that some DACs can have. I listened to the rest of the Speicher 118 EP and found the same experience on every tune. I find it interesting that whilst nothing is missing from the recordings, the voicing of this DAC does make them really easy to listen to and not at all grating. In some ways, this is a DAC that will appeal to more people than our LEEMA Libra DAC will and I possibly count myself in that group if I was listening purely for pleasure – the Leema is more incisive and clinical, the JADIS more rounded and easy to get on with long term. As always, your mileage may vary.

Turning to something a little different in the form of Doug MacLeod and his Black Night record, I was immediately drawn into the tracks laidback and smoky blues club vibe. Brushes on cymbals were easy to pick out from the back of the stage, whilst MacLeods’s guitar picking cut through the mix – just steely enough to be realistic without being aurally cutting – very lifelike. The detail this DAC manages to bring out of the file it is presented with is excellent and apparent with the background details and sounds I’m hearing. It’s back to that word “musical” again and I genuinely cannot think of a better word for this DAC. Very natural and very unforced is what I’m getting at. Big Daddy Wilson’s Deep in My Soul popped up next and whilst this is a bigger blues production and has more going on than Doug MacLeod, the DAC doesn’t miss a beat. What I loved here was the detail around effects and other spatial cues. There was a very “live” feeling to the music playing and I liked that!

QUIBBLES

It’s a magnet for fingerprints.

The casework isn’t going to appeal to everyone.

Lack of filters may put some folk off but I like that “this way or the highway” approach.

A softer and more analogue sound than our reference.

CONCLUSION

This is a very natural-sounding DAC. I'm pained to use the words organic and analogue, but I think they kind of sum this JADIS DAC up pretty well. It has no sense of harshness and as such comes across as being very nice to listen to – musical is a word bandied about a fair bit and I guess this is what I'm trying to convey with the words I'm using to describe this DAC.

If you have read this review and you got the impression that this DAC is a bit “pipe and slippers” then I apologise as this is not what I'm trying to convey, though I can understand why you, dear reader, might think this. There is a gentleness to the sound this DAC brings to the table, but that's not at the expense of detail or dynamics, it's more a case of it just being lovely to sit and listen to.

I'm giving this DAC our Five Hearts award and the only areas it loses points is on the lack of perceived features by way of filters and other technological distractions that some people may want to have. Personally I prefer this approach but putting my reviewers hat on I need to be aware of readers and their wants and needs. However, get beyond these and accept that the JADIS DAC concentrates on delivering the music, and I think the vast majority of folk who manage to get themselves in front of this DAC will absolutely love it as much as I did.

I don't need a new DAC at the moment, but this would be top of the list of the current DACS I've heard sub-15K.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality and Features:

I love the aesthetic but realise it won't be to everyone's taste

The switch and knob both feel like luxury items

The LEDs on the front are clear (*but unobtrusive*) and indicate what's playing and its bit depth etc.

Balanced and RCA outputs

All the required digital inputs

Nothing superfluous

Sound Quality:

Relaxed and untaxing sound – some will say “musical”



Not at all topky and as such completely easy to listen to for extended periods of time

Natural throughout the frequency range and the tops have a lovely quality that is hard to put into words, but one that is “nice” to listen to

As analogue sounding DAC as I’ve come across and similar to our big Lampizator in that respect

Value For Money:

It’s not a cheap DAC but then quality never is cheap

We Loved:

The look

The simplicity of the interface – on-off switch plus a source selector and a handful of LEDs

The sound is just so easy to fall in love with

We Didn’t Love So Much:

May be too polite for some who prefer a more “incisive” sonic presentation

Finger prints become apparent very quickly – but you shouldn’t need to touch the unit other than the on/off switch and the source selector

There’s no remote, but then do you need one?

Elevator Pitch Review: French brand JADIS are a well-known and well-loved brand that produces a wide range of gear that features valves at their heart. The JS2 SL carries on this valve-based approach in a DAC that may be light on bells and whistles but delivers a sound that is so easy to listen to that you lose hours simply getting lost in the music. For some tastes, it may not have an “incisive” enough sound at the top end, but for others it will tick all the right sonic boxes. Sonically, this DAC is laidback and as analogue sounding as I’ve heard and I’m forced to use words in this review that I don’t like using like organic, musical, and analogue-sounding – however, I think they fit this DAC perfectly. It’s a DAC that’s hard to overly criticise and I thoroughly enjoyed having the opportunity to listen to it.

Price: 10,900 Euros



Stuart Smith