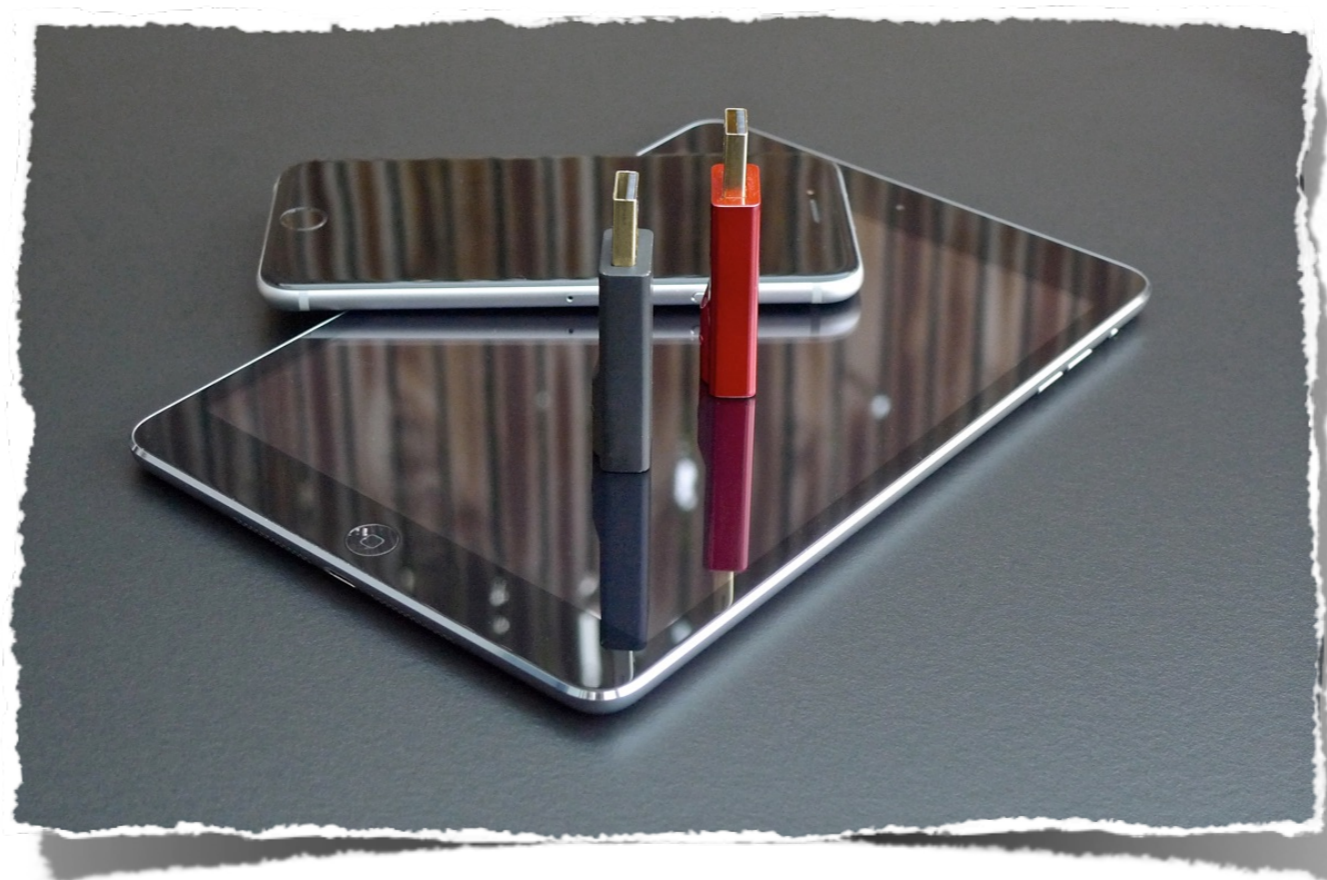


# AudioQuest DragonFly Black & Red USB DAC's

*From Smartphone to  
High End Music Player*



# DragonFly Black & Red

*The AudioQuest DragonFly Black and Red, which were announced earlier this year, are the successors of the immensely popular DragonFly 1.2 with which AudioQuest dominated the field of compact USB da-converters and headphone amplifiers for quite a while. But time didn't stand still, and digital technology has advanced a lot in the last few years. Besides that, new insights in the way most people listen to music nowadays forced AudioQuest's engineers to look for new parts that would enable new applications. They succeeded, and the DragonFly Black and Red we present to you here turned out to be so good that we'd rather speak of a revolution than an evolution.*



# DragonFly history

When the original DragonFly 1.0 hit the market in 2012, something special happened in several ways. First of all it was an electronic product from a manufacturer that - a few exceptions aside - occupied itself mainly with all kinds of cables. Secondly it was more or less the first high grade all-in-1 portable USB da-converter and headphone amplifier on which could also play hi-res music files. And, lastly, everyone was really surprised about the incredible sound quality of this USB 'thumb drive'. All of a sudden it was very easy and utterly affordable to equip your computer with a great external sound card. The concept caught on real quick, many other manufacturers started making comparable products. And just when when rapid developments in digital audio started to surpass the DragonFly 1.0 the good people at AudioQuest came with the DragonFly 1.2 that gave better sound quality at a significantly lower price. And not just better than it's predecessor, but better than most comparable products from other brands. So what can the AudioQuest DragonFly Black and Red add to that?



# AudioQuest DragonFly Black

With its matte black casing, the AudioQuest DragonFly Black looks exactly like the DragonFly 1.2, save for its gold plated USB plug, where the one on the 1.2 was nickel plated. On the inside, however, the DragonFly Black is completely different. The biggest difference is that the new ESS 9010 32bit da-converter need so little power that it can be fed directly from a portable device, without putting a significantly higher strain on the battery. And that gives access a whole new world of possibilities. Where the DragonFly 1.2 still needed the 5V USB power from a laptop or a desktop computer, you can connect the DragonFly Black directly to your tablet or smartphone when you have the right adapter. Off you go, playing hi-res music files up to 24bit/96kHz. For Apple products, you need the Lightning to USB Camera Adapter, and for Android gear you have to get yourself a USB OTG (On The Go) Adapter. The DragonFly Black's output power is high enough to make even an 'relatively easy to drive' larger headphone like the AudioQuest Nighthawk really sing, but a good in-ear like the Bowers & Wilkins C5 will also do quite nicely. Another remarkable new function is that you can flash the DragonFly Black with firmware upgrades. So when AudioQuest comes up with software improvements, all you have to do is hook up the Black to your computer, go to your special AudioQuest account and Bob's your uncle. Like this, you do not need a physical replacement to get a new device. That's not just very sustainable, it's downright awesome!



# AudioQuest DragonFly Red

Like the name says, the AudioQuest DragonFly Red has a nice and shiny, fiery red casing and a gold plated USB connector just like the Black. That's a really stunning colour combination that reminds us of AudioQuest's Cinnamon range of digital cables. Like the Black, the DragonFly Red draws so little power that you can connect it directly to a smartphone or tablet to play up to 24/96 music files, when you have the right adapter. The new ESS 9016 32bit da-converter in the DragonFly Red gives it a slightly higher output power than the DragonFly Black, which results in a more authoritative and effortless musical performance. The DragonFly Red, like the DragonFly Black, has the possibility to receive future upgrades through a free desktop app. So both DragonFlies have the advantage that you can keep them up-to-date all the time.



# With the DragonFly's on an iPhone?

For the first part of the listening session we used an iPhone 6 and the standard iOS music player, which is unable to play hi-res flac files by the way. If you want that (and believe us, the Dragonfly Black is worth it...) you need to install the Onkyo HF player app and unlock it's hi-res capability as an in-app buy. But we think most people will just use the player's standard resolution, so we did too. The tracks we listened to were Everglow, from the new Coldplay album A Head Full Of Dreams, and Concentrate/Shaker by Joris voorn, from the album Fabric 83. With the AudioQuest Nighthawk straight from the iPhone, the music sounded pretty okay at first. The Night-Hawk is not particularly demanding, and the built-in amp of the iPhone can handle it quite well. Or so we thought. When we hooked up the DragonFly Black our jaws dropped. Literally. All of a sudden, the exciting Joris Voorn dance track was playing more spacious and detailed, with a tighter and fuller low-end and more drive altogether. Also, the music sounded more 'around the head' instead of exactly in the middle between the ears, which

is a phenomenon that usually takes away some of the joy of listening to a pair of headphones. With the Coldplay track, the added drive was quite noticeable. The music had more colour and dynamics, it was more spacious and the intelligibility of the vocals was much better.



The step up from a 'plain iPhone' to the DragonFly Black was huge. Which - in retrospect - was sort of obvious. But to be honest, we didn't expect the same increase when we moved over to the DragonFly Red. We couldn't have been more wrong. With the Joris Voorn track, the increase in drive and authority was obvious from the first second. The spaciousness became so much bigger that most of the music seemed to be playing outside the ear cups now, giving the illusion that we were listening to a good pair of loudspeakers. The reproduction of details also got better, again. Everything was absolutely clean now, with added structure, especially in the lower regions. We felt so much more involved with the music. When listening to Coldplay, we noticed better transparency and overall pressure, and added warmth on the vocals. All of a sudden, the iPhone was transformed into a high-end music source that could easily take on other high-end dedicated player brands like Astell&Kern.

# DragonFly Black and Red on a Mac mini

When we connected the DragonFly Black to the Mac mini (with Roon player software and an AudioQuest Victoria interconnect) in the main set, it was surprising to hear how 'mature' its sound was, compared to the standard analog output of the Mac mini. The performance at this price level was nothing short of stunning, and anyone who listens to music on their computer every now and then should get their hands on at least a DragonFly Black. Still, we noticed a slight limitation in the reproduction of the highest frequencies. They sounded much better than without the DragonFly, obviously, but we would have liked a little more subtlety. When we were listening to the (mainly instrumental) electronic music of Joris Voorn we didn't really notice it, but the voice of Coldplay-singer Chris Martin had a certain 'lisp' that we could definitely do without.

This is where the DragonFly Red came in. With both Joris Voorn and Coldplay the music became more 'fluid', cleaner and more spacious. Chris Martin's voice moved deeper into the mix, with more warmth and without the lisp, and the overall projection was bigger and more stable, more as a whole and totally without the compression that we could sometimes still hear in the more densely produced sections of the music, when we were listening to the DragonFly Black.



# Conclusion

As far as we're concerned, AudioQuest has upped the ante again. They have definitely set a new standard for compact USB da-converters with their new DragonFly Black and Red. By adding the battery-less portable functionality, owners of an iPhone or any other high grade mobile device can listen to high end music reproduction on the go. The target group of these DragonFly's is explicitly not limited to audiophiles (although they will thoroughly enjoy them) and that is actually what makes them so utterly brilliant. AudioQuest was arguably the first company to open the gate for 'regular' music lovers who wanted better sound from their computer, and now they have done the same for a vast group of mobile listeners. A masterstroke!





# Extra information

For additional information about the AudioQuest DragonFly Black and Red USB da-converters and for pricing, see our online shop:

[AudioQuest DragonFly Black](#)

[AudioQuest DragonFly Red](#)

Spotify

[Coldplay - A Head Full of Dreams](#)

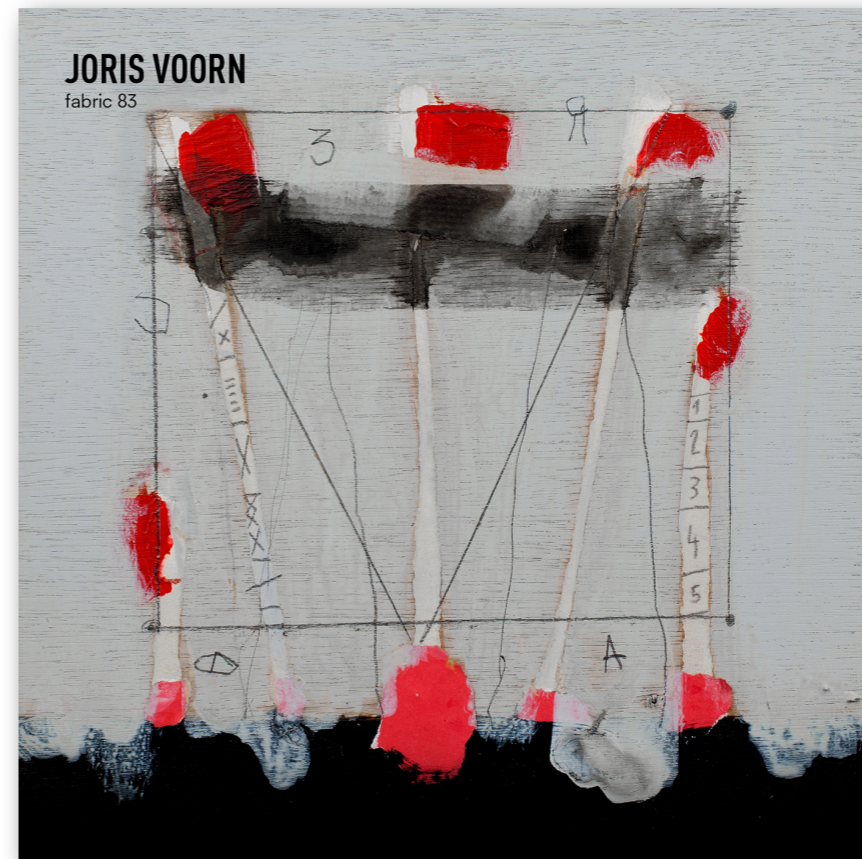
iTunes

[Joris Voorn - Fabric 83](#)

Tidal

[Coldplay - A Head Full of Dreams](#)

[Joris Voorn - Fabric 83](#)



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