

Auralic Altair G1

*And how about the
Auralic Vega G1 and Chord Qutest?*



Auralic Altair G1

The Auralic Altair G1 is a real all-in-1 streamer, da-converter and pream-plifier. You can even have a harddrive built into it to put your music on. That makes it the perfect stand-alone solution for music lovers who want to improve their music streaming without the need for several different enclosures and elaborate cabling. The previous Altair was very popular for that exact reason, but now Auralic has added the Altair concept to their G-Series, making it an even more desirable machine.



A bit of tech-talk

Traditionally, this is where I direct people who want the technical nitty-gritty to the excellent Auralic [website](#). However, there are some interesting aspects that I want to highlight before starting with the rather extensive report on the listening session. First of all the Altair G1 - contrary to its predecessor - no longer has a USB output. Whether that is a problem remains to be seen and, especially, heard. If you want better, you could get yourself a Vega G1 da-converter, that has the exact same functionality as the Altair G1 when used as a Roon endpoint. When you don't have Roon or if you would rather just use the superb proprietary Auralic Lightning DS streaming software and app, you need to add at least an Aries G1 if you do not already own an Auralic streamer of some kind. However, the Vega G1 does not have at the server function that you need to index music that is stored in your local network. So when you don't have Roon and you don't listen to online streaming services like Qobuz, Tidal and internet radio, or if you would rather just use the superb proprietary Auralic Lightning DS streaming software and app, you need to add at least an Aries G1 if you do not already own an Auralic streamer of some kind.

The Altair G1 is fitted with Auralic's own Tesla platform. Tesla is the name that Auralic gave to their proprietary streaming hardware. It cleans up and realigns the digital signal in several ways, so stuff like jitter and 'source born noise' essentially become things of the past, greatly improving streaming quality. Signals connected to the four hardware digital inputs (Toslink,

Coaxial, AES/EBU and USB-B) do not pass through the Tesla hardware, but all the streaming from the Lightning DS platform and all the other 'internal' streaming inputs do. And there is quite a lot of internal inputs: a NAS, an external harddrive attached to the USB A input, the optional internal harddrive, a UPnP/DLNA media server, Roon, Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay, Spotify Connect, Songcast and online streaming services like Tidal, Qobuz and internet radio. Both over wireless (Wi-Fi) and cabled (ethernet) connections.

Auralic Altair G1 - Setup

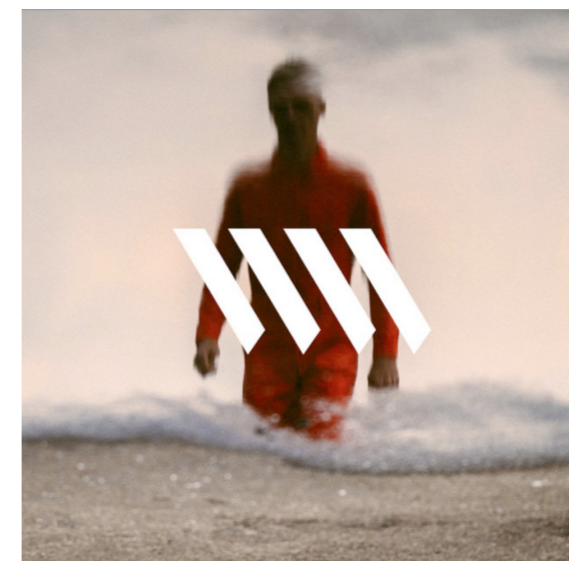
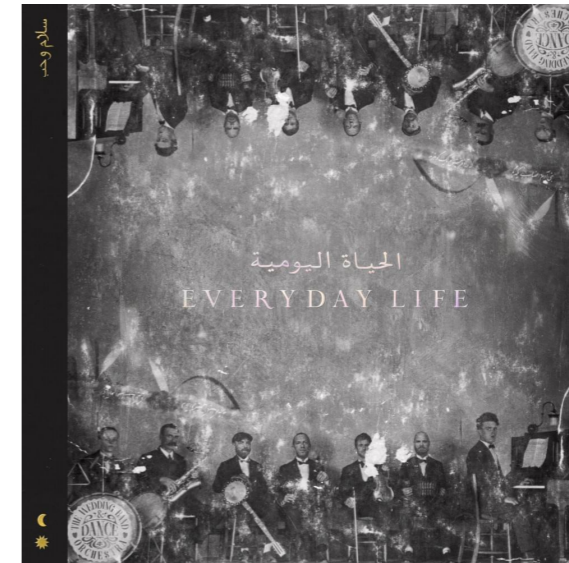
For this review I used the Auralic Altair G1 as a stand-alone streamer in a set. So not as a headphone amplifier, even though it has an excellent headphone output. Playback was controlled by Roon. That choice was primarily based on the fact that I wanted to add the Auralic Vega G1 to



the equation later in the listening session. Because there was no Aries streamer at hand I could not use Lightning DS for the Vega G1. So Roon was used to level the playing field. During previous experiences with Auralic I had already concluded that the difference in sound quality between Roon and Lightning DS was negligible. However, I found the difference between Wi-Fi and ethernet that is currently reported by some users interesting enough to include in the listening comparisons.

Initially I only used the included power cords after determining the right mains polarity. Crystal Cable **Diamond** series interconnects were used to hook up the Altair G1 to the usual Linn Klimax set with Wilson Benesch Trinity loudspeakers. An Auralic Vega G1 and a Chord Electronics **Qutest** with **SBooster** power supply were on stand-by for comparison. The first listening sessions had made clear that the Altair G1 sounds absolutely great with high resolution DSD and MQA, but during the definitive listening session I chose to use only tracks in the most commonly used PCM file format.

The 'reference' tracks for this review were the choir-sung gospel When I Need A Friend from Coldplay's new album Everyday Life (24/96 resolution on Qobuz), the neo-classical One Step Slower from Sebastian Plano's album Verve (24/44.1 on the NAS) and the electronic progressive trance of Ryo, from Joris Voorn's new album Four (16/44.1 on Qobuz).



Listening to the Altair G1

During the definitive listening sessions I listened to the Altair G1 in several ways. It started more or less 'fresh from the box' with only the digital filter set to Smooth, using the Lightning DS app. From there different things were progressively changed. In between I also listened to the Chord Qutest da-converter and at the end of the session the Vega G1 was hooked up. The wired connections came from an SBooster-fed standard D-Link switch connected to the router with AudioQuest Carbon CAT700 ethernet cable.

Auralic Altair G1, standard power cord, wireless by Wi-Fi

In this configuration the music sounded nice and spacious, with excellent stage depth and also some forward projection. The bass was colourful and went deep in the Joris Voorn track. Drive and timing were excellent too and there was a lot of texture. Sebastian Plano's acoustic piano sounded fast and detailed and the low strings sounded full, smooth and fluid. The choir in the Coldplay song clearly had different voices that were easy to hear individually. It was clear that Auralic put a lot of effort in getting the best possible wireless signal transfer over Wi-Fi, because a certain flatness that is often caused by lesser wireless connections was completely absent.

Auralic Altair G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Pearl RJ/E network cable

With the AudioQuest Pearl CAT7 in place, all music sounded a little bit less constrained and a trace of coloration in the midband had vanished. The music became more relaxed. Nonetheless, for future Auralic owners it is good to know that a wired network connection is not strictly necessary in the place where you want to put your Altair G1. When you do not compare it directly, a wireless connection is really all you need to enjoy great sound.

Auralic Altair G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Carbon RJ/E network cable

When the AudioQuest Carbon CAT700 replaced the Pearl it became clear that a better wired connection can eke out even more quality from the Altair G1. The music got bigger and more spacious and the individual parts of the mix were easier to distinguish. The bass got more pressure and the overall performance became more supple and dynamic, not unlike upgrading from an Apple Lossless file to an AIFF file of the same song. Connaisseurs will know what I'm talking about here.



Chord Qutest and AudioQuest Vodka versus Diamond RJ/E



Chord Electronics Qutest, with Smooth filter and AudioQuest Carbon coax digital

To me, the Chord Qutest is an excellent reference in the sub-2k price range. Given its price-tag it is a direct competitor of the da-converter section of the Auralic Altair G1. With the Qutest, the music sounded very agile and fluid, and a little more spacious than with the Auralic. But it also sounded a bit leaner in the low end, although nicely detailed. Overall, the tone of the

Qutest was slightly lighter and there was a tiny bit of congestion in the choral voices. Compared to the Altair G1 I would call the overall sound 'more audiophile' with more focus on resolution.

Auralic Altair G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Vodka RJ/E network cable

Back to the Altair G1, where the AudioQuest Vodka got to prove once again that it sits right in the sweet spot between audiophile resolution and a somewhat fuller sound with more tonal color. The music became even more relaxed but at the same time more substantial. Texture and overtones in the acoustic piano were more audible, and the sound became more authoritative, with a 'blacker' background. Tones had more decay and dynamics and sub-bass also profited from the Vodka.

Auralic Altair G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Diamond RJ/E network cable

When it comes to detail, openness and texture, there is nothing I know that beats the AudioQuest Diamond. But the ultimate neutrality of this cable may sometimes be at the expense of involvement. The bass was beautifully deep but a little more diffuse. The Vodka sounds shorter and 'more solid' especially on dynamic sounds like a kick drum, and therefore more exciting.

At this point however, it is also possible to establish how incredibly good the Auralic Altair G1 really is. Objectivists will have my head for this no doubt, but it is my firm belief that the intrinsic quality of a player determines how easily differences between cables can be heard and interpreted, assuming that the rest of the setup remains the same. The differences are clear on the Auralic Altair G1, so you do the math...

Auralic Vega G1 da-converter and AudioQuest Monsoon

Auralic Vega G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Vodka RJ/E network cable, using Roon

Now that I had established that the Altair G1 could be brought to even greater musical heights on a wired connection, and that the AudioQuest Vodka had the best balance between resolution and tonal color, it was time to switch to the Auralic Vega G1. What can you expect from a da-converter that costs about twice as much - not counting the streamer part of the Altair G1.

Well, quite a lot apparently. The Vega G1 beats the Altair G1 in every way. It sounds bigger, relaxter and more confident, more neutral - but not less colourful - and more balanced. But I also noticed how incredibly well the 'Auralic' character of the Altair G1 was retained. I find it very impressive when a manufacturer is able to maintain this level of consistence, and the Vega G1 is a very good example of just that.



Auralic Vega G1, standard power cord, wired with AudioQuest Diamond RJ/E network cable

With the AudioQuest Diamond CAT7 on the Vega G1, I heard the same improvement as with the Altair G1. More texture and detail, more spacious and dynamics and the same beautifully deep but less 'tight' bass. With the AudioQuest Vodka CAT7, the music sounds more 'concrete', while the AudioQuest Diamond CAT7 sounds more 'ethereal'. My personal preference leans towards the Vodka, but someone else could easily prefer the Diamond. The deliberation is a matter of taste rather than absolute quality.

Auralic Vega G1, AudioQuest Monsoon power cord, wired with AudioQuest Diamond RJ/E network cable

Until now I had listened with the standard power cords. In the user manual Auralic states that 'bulky power cords' are not necessary because their players have low power consumption. They also warn you that the higher weight of a big power cable may damage the IEC input on the back of the

unit. While the first statement may be open for debate, but the second one does not hold up as far as I'm concerned. All you have to do is minimise the tensile force on the IEC input with some careful cable dressing. Like that, I was able to connect the bulky and rather stiff AudioQuest Monsoon almost 'weightlessly' to the back of the Altair G1. And boy did that make an interesting difference!

The music got more control, more texture, more color and more authority. From my review of the AudioQuest [Wind Series](#) I knew that the Monsoon would give more 'tone' and most people - including me - really like that.

Auralic Altair G1, AudioQuest Monsoon power cord, wired with AudioQuest Vodka RJ/E network cable

With the good result on the Vega G1 in mind I moved the Monsoon power cord to the Altair G1 for a final listen. The AudioQuest Vodka CAT700 was used to emphasise the greater spaciousness, tonal color, quietness and texture in a most pleasurable way. What struck me most though was that the final trace of congestion was gone now. The choral voices in the Coldplay track now sounded perfectly free and rounded. So a better power cord is definitely interesting! Just don't let it hang heavily off the back of your Auralic, perhaps even support it, but don't let this chance to hear better music be taken from you.



Concluding

To be honest, I knew it immediately after the first listening session: The Auralic Altair G1 delivers incredible value for money. The building quality is stunning and it has oodles of connectivity. On one hand you have to accept that a future upgrade with a better DAC is not possible, but on the other hand the Altair G1 sounds so good that a significant upgrade will set you back 'loadsamoney'. That being said, the Auralic Vega G1 showed clearly what a better da-converter can still bring, even if that means doubling your expense. However, if you don't use Roon, the UPnP interface experience will be somewhat disappointing. But if you already own an (older) Auralic streamer the Vega G1 will be an excellent upgrade. When you compare the Altair G1 with the Chord Qutest according to it's performance as a da-converter alone you are faced with a trade-off between the heart and the head. But realistically the Qutest misses out on a lot of features that the Altair has to offer, and as far as I'm concerned the Chord should feel lucky that the Altair is not in the sub-2K euros price range, otherwise it would have had a formidable new competitor for it's reference status. The Auralic Altair G1 is a stunner!



Music and information

You can find more information and prices about the described Altair and Vega G1, Qutest DAC and AudioQuest in our webshop:

[Auralic Altair G1 en Auralic Vega G1](#)

[Chord Electronics Qutest](#)

[AudioQuest netwerk cables](#)

[AudioQuest power cables](#)

Qobuz

[Joris Voorn - Four](#)

[Sebatian Plano - Verve](#)

[Coldplay - Everyday Life](#)

Tidal

[Joris Voorn - Four](#)

[Sebatian Plano - Verve](#)

[Coldplay - Everyday Life](#)

Spotify

[Joris Voorn - Four](#)

[Sebatian Plano - Verve](#)

[Coldplay - Everyday Life](#)





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