

Chord Hugo M Scaler and Hugo TT 2

Upscaling on the highest level



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The Chord Hugo M Scaler and Hugo TT 2 that we present here fill the gap between the smaller Chord Qutest and the mighty Chord Dave da-converters. Well, price-wise they do, because the Hugo TT 2, like its predecessor, is primarily a Table Top (hence TT...) headphone amplifier. However, the Chord Hugo TT 2 - alone or combined with the Chord Hugo M Scaler - will be used as a stand-alone da-converter by many audiophiles. And rightly so! In this review we will describe what the M Scaler adds to the equation, but we will also tell you about our experiments with an upgrade power supply. Because what happened when we added that... boy oh boy...



Hugo M Scaler introduction



The Chord Hugo M Scaler is - bluntly put - an upscaler. It raises the sampling frequency of the incoming digital signal to a staggering 705.6kHz, that's sixteen times the resolution of a Red Book cd, and a 96kHz signal is raised to 768kHz. It does that - and this is where things get more complicated - by means of extremely sophisticated filters and converters that are designed by Chord's digital wizard Rob Watts, and programmed onto a so called Field Programmable Gate Array, or FPGA. An FPGA is a blank 'chip' that can be programmed freely, so you can also turn it into a highly refined da-converter with unique digital filtering. And over the years we have discovered that it is precisely those filters that have the biggest impact on how good a da-converter sounds.

A short heads-up

When we **reviewed** the Chord Hugo TT in januari 2016 we said it was One Step Beyond, by which we meant 'beyond the Chord Hugo'. And it was, even though internally it was basically a Chord Hugo with a much better power supply and a more powerful headphone amplifier. The better power supply made an impressive difference in sound quality, but when you only wanted to use it as a da-converter, the price difference between it and the Chord Hugo was rather steep. With the Hugo TT 2, Chord finally says goodbye to that 'dark blonde' sheep in the family, because the Hugo TT 2 was developed from the ground up, and now contains double the computing power of the Hugo 2 and the Qutest. And that is easy to hear! That is why we start this review with a comparison between the Qutest and the Hugo TT 2.



Setup and Music

The reference set was, as usual, a full Linn Klimax system with Wilson Benesch loudspeakers, hooked up with Crystal Cable and AudioQuest. The streaming source was an Auralic Aries Mini, upgraded with an SBooster linear power supply, and the Chord Qutest, on which the Warm Rolled Off filter was activated. This time we chose music by Sidsel Endresen and Bugge Wesseltoft (Try, from their album Out here In There - sophisticated Scandinavian pop-music) and Ferenc Snétberger (Empathy, from his album Nomad - virtuoso acoustic guitar jazz).



Chord Qutest with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply

Nothing wrong with this, really. Very enjoyable and we could comfortably grow old with this combination. Sidsel Endresen sounded like we're used to; precise, colourful yet neutral, with power and great transparency. A small ground hum can be heard at the beginning of the track, and we could easily distinguish it. Sibilants were slightly pronounced, but that was due to the recording itself, and as a positive side-effect we heard lots of articulation and 'vocal cords'. Ferenc Snétberger sounded intimate, warm, fast, colourful and spacious. The guitar sounded beautiful and it was easy to hear that it used nylon strings for the higher registers. Bass was deep and sonorous, and the drums sounded subdued but also fast and precise, with lots of micro-dynamics. All in all a very charming sound.



Compare...



Chord Hugo TT 2 with standard power supply

When we replaced the Chord Qutest with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply with the Chord Hugo TT 2 with its original power supply, we heard more authority and pressure in the recording of Ferenc Snétberger. The room extended towards us and showed a bigger stage. The uscg in total became more refined, cleaner, and more realistic, with more power in the sounds of Bugge's Fender piano. Small details were cleaner and the background was blacker. With the old Hugo TT, we could attribute that to the battery that acted as a buffer between the power grid and the circuit, but the Hugo TT 2 doesn't have a battery anymore, only the Supercapacitors that offer support when large peaks in the music demand more power are still in there. So the improvement in sound quality probably comes down to the larger computing capacity of the new digital processor.

Chord Hugo TT 2 with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply

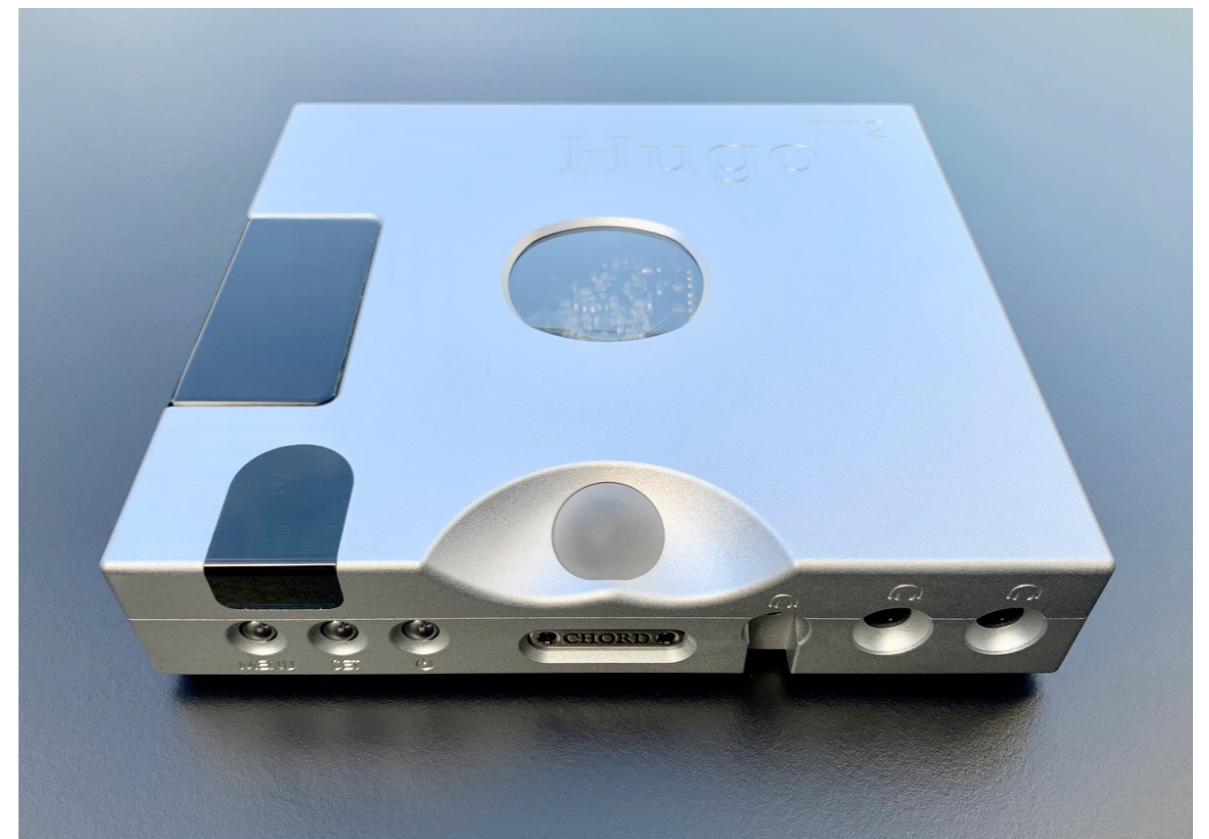
Chord themselves say that the SMPS (Switch Mode Power Supply) that is included with the Hugo TT 2 sounds best, so we didn't expect much from a better power supply. How wrong we were! The answer to that, according to SBooster designer Wiebren Draaijer, lies in the fact that the standard power supply still generates quite a lot of high frequency noise, that finds it's way into the shielding of the circuit and from there to the ground connector of the outputs. Be that as it may, Sidel Endresen sounded positively softer. The music was laid out more intimately and more up close, and everything had more tone. Besides that, we got a deeper insight into the music, with more small details. Snétberger's lighthearted jazz had more flow and freedom, and that band played more like an ensemble. Timing improved and the bass became tighter and slightly rounder.

Chord Hugo TT 2 with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply and Chord Hugo M Scaler with standard BNC cable and standard power supply

This was the moment we had been waiting for. The Chord Hugo M Scaler was connected between the Auralic and the Hugo TT 2. From the M Scaler to the TT 2 we used the BNC cable that came with the Hugo TT 2. There was definitely room for improvement there, but for the rest of the review we went with this standard cable. Ferenc Snétberger's music became cleaner and even more lighthearted with the M Scaler in place. There was more control in the bass, with more nuance. The overall sound had less stress. With Sidsel Endresen we heard the same improvement in the bass, but her voice seemed to be a little more detached, like she was singing a bit hesitantly. On one hand we found it more audiophile, but on the other hand a little too well-mannered.

Chord Hugo TT 2 with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply and Chord Hugo M Scaler with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply

We kind of expected this to happen: after we added an Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply to the Chord Hugo M Scaler the party really started. The recording of Sidsel Endresen sounded much more involved, with more enthusiasm. Her voice sounded warm and intimate and the timing was now spot-on. Little details in the Fender piano were much more audible and the music became more rhythmically compelling. The track by Ferenc Snétberger became more personal and musical as well. We were sitting closer to the music and we heard more small details in dynamics, especially in the drums. The bass, which apparently had been a little swollen and 'overhung', was now spotless and rhythmically perfect.



With and without M Scaler



With Chord M Scaler versus without Chord M Scaler

To make sure that we had not been carried away by confirmation bias we decided to remove the Chord M Scaler from the chain again. Switching back can be very enlightening. The track by Snétberger became more bass-heavy without the M Scaler, but it was less controlled. Staging became more compact. With the Chord M Scaler back in the system again the music sounded more alive, and every element had more room around it. Timing became better and the band played more as a whole. Cymbals sounded cleaner and more colourful with the M Scaler, and the music became more involving. There was more spaciousness and instruments appeared to have a longer decay time. Dynamics improved as well, and there was less stress. All this with the SBooster power supply connected to the Hugo TT 2 of course. The track by Sidsel Endresen confirmed our findings. With the M Scaler in the system the music had more 'groove'.

Chord M Scaler with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply on the Chord Qutest with Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply

Even though the price difference was way off, we decided to go ahead and do this little experiment anyway, mainly because we were so very curious about this ourselves. But remember, this one is out of competition. The Chord M Scaler on the Chord Qutest definitely gave an effect that was very similar to what happened when we put the M Scaler on the Hugo TT 2. The Qutest became quite a bit better sounding, but please restrain ye...when you already own this sublime little da-converter, it doesn't turn into a Hugo TT 2 by adding the M Scaler. When you consider that you really need two upgrade power supplies as well, it is clear that the more sensible first step in upgrading the digital chain is to get yourself a Hugo TT 2.

Concluding...

The Chord Hugo TT 2 surpasses its predecessor in every possible way, and as a stand-alone DAC it performs on an incredibly high level. With a better power supply that level becomes even higher. For those who really want the cream of the musical crop, and are willing to invest in an extra piece of kit, more cabling and a better power supply, the Chord Hugo M Scaler is a logical step towards even better sounding music. Surprisingly we found that the difference between a Hugo TT 2 and a Hugo TT 2 with an SBooster was bigger than what happened when we added the Hugo M Scaler with its standard power supply. Nevertheless, that turned out to be the most logical step after all. But the best fun we had was when we added another SBooster power supply. The Chord Hugo M Scaler does really incredible things to your music, but a better power supply, as far as we are concerned, is an absolute no-brainer.



Music and Information

More information and prices about the Chord M Scaler, Hugo TT 2 and Sbooster power supplies can be found in our webshop:

[Chord Hugo M Scaler](#)

[Chord Hugo TT 2 da-converter](#)

[Sbooster BOTW ECO MKII power supply](#)

Spotify

[Ferenc Snétberger \(Nomad\)](#)

[Sidsel Endresen en Bugge Wesseltoft - Out Here In There](#)

Tidal

[Ferenc Snétberger \(Nomad\)](#)

[Sidsel Endresen en Bugge Wesseltoft - Out Here In There](#)





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