

Mains Cables R Us

Arcam rDAC power supply

Noise annoys, power corrupts. I could continue with the platitudes, but most audiophiles have already grasped the general concept that mains power – and the relative quality thereof – has a major influence on sound. For example, anyone who burns the midnight oil, likely listening to smoky jazz after dark, will find their system sounds better than when the rest of the world is boiling kettles and/or watching *Coronation Street* a few hours earlier. This is down to the usage that the mains power supply is getting – and therefore the amount of noise that's in it. At midnight, far fewer computers and fluorescent lights are on, and suddenly your hi-fi system starts to sing...

The same principle applies to this little device. It's been designed to give the Arcam rDAC a cleaner electrical feed than it would otherwise have – without of course having to wait till everyone's gone to bed! £195 buys you this two-box regulated linear power supply, designed to aspirate the aforementioned digital convertor with a better class of 12v DC power than it would otherwise get from its standard power supply.

Whereas the latter is nothing more than a tiny switched mode device set inside a plasticky plug-type thingie, the MCRU product comes in two cases. The smaller one sits next to the rDAC, while the larger one should be sited a good way away. Both contain voltage regulators, both are sited where the company says they'll do the best job. One faces the mains supply, dealing with its assorted noise, distortion and random variations, whilst the other points to the rDAC which is asking for constantly varying current. The job of both is to supply a rock-steady voltage that ignores the changing load.

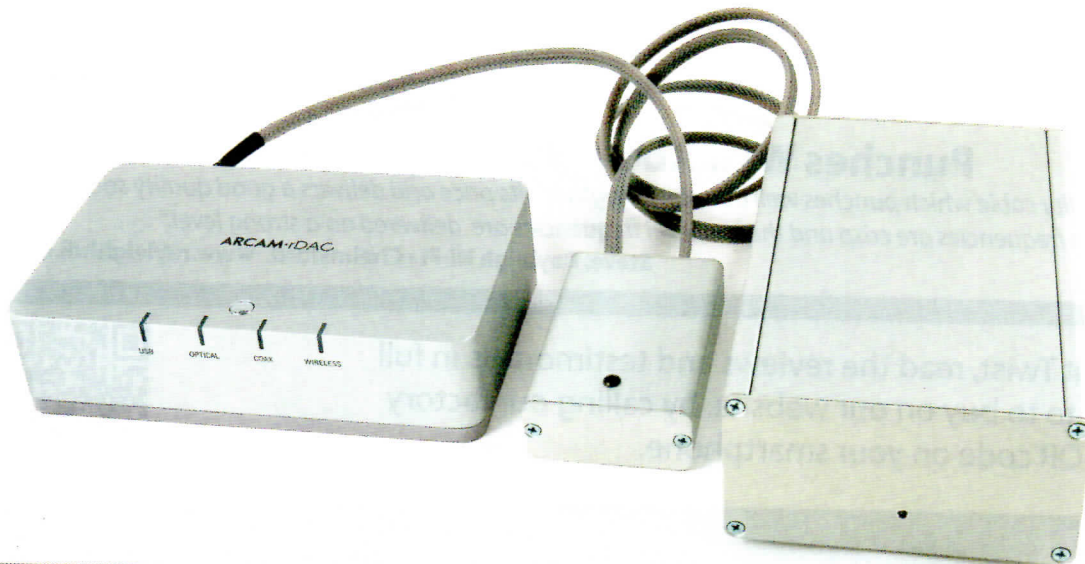
Specifically, the first regulator sits close to the mains supply which it converts to a low(ish) noise DC supply. The latter handles the changing demands of the load,

close to the main box – it's a bespoke design based on a low noise multi-stage filtered voltage reference, a low noise amplifier and a high current, low resistance MOSFET, the company says. All the remaining space in the second regulator box is filled with low impedance capacitors to act as a local energy source. Mains Cables R Us says that by using a two-stage regulator, a noise floor better than most battery supplies is achieved, along with a very low effective source resistance.

Sound quality

The stock Arcam rDAC is an excellent little product, coming second in a recent *Hi-Fi Choice* Blind-Listening Group Test. For £300 it offers a sound quality that few can match anywhere near the price; it's quite smooth and very musical, and even has a fair stab at conjuring up a decent soundstage. If there are criticisms to be made, it's the slightly forward upper midband, which tends to over-illuminate female vocals, and the bass is a little mechanical. It could be better in its stage depth too, as everything tends to cluster around the plane of the loudspeakers. So does this fancy power supply help?

I am happy to answer with a resounding "yes". It provides a whole new level of performance to the humble rDAC, stripping away its major weaknesses at a stroke, to expose the little digital convertor's innate strengths. It sounds more musical and less mechanical, it's a little more dynamic with less of a sense of there being a residual 'mush' at low levels. Bass gets slightly stronger, fuller and more articulate – it certainly sounds less wooden. Across the midband, there's better detail and a slightly more expansive soundstage, with useful improvements in depth perspective. Tonally, it's smoother too, with less sibilance and a darker, more velvety feel. Treble is cleaner and smoother too. Overall then, an excellent value for money upgrade. **ES**



DETAILS

PRICE: £195
WEBSITE:
MAINSCABLES
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OUR VERDICT

