

FURUTECH

HiFi Choice (UK) – ADL Esprit Review
August 2012



High spirits



The ADL Esprit is Furutech's most ambitious DAC/preamplifier yet. **Jason Kennedy** has a very fine time with it...

The ADL Esprit is the latest in a growing line of compact electronics products from this Japanese company, and the next step up from the GT40 launched last year. A preamplifier and digital-to-analogue convertor in a six inch-wide box, it sports some premium components inside and very high build quality overall.

The size is misleading – you don't expect Furutech's Teflon insulated RCA phono sockets and a beautifully machined stainless volume control on something that would fit in a coat pocket. The reasoning goes that, as Sun Ra put it, space is the place – or to be more precise space is in short supply for most of us, therefore having compact components is the way forward. The only thing missing on the Esprit is a remote control and this leads me to think that Furutech developed it as a serious preamp for computer audio systems with decent and preferably active loudspeakers.

Prime among the socketry is the Tenor-sourced 24-bit/96kHz USB B input/output, which means that not only can it work with the output of your PC, but can take the output of your phono stage, digitise it and send it into the computer where you can record it. This is an unusual feature, and will prove popular with anyone wishing to archive a vinyl record or tape collection.

It sports a Wolfson 24/192 DAC and an Asahi Kasei ADC that runs at the same rate, giving you 96kHz of bandwidth for your analogue recordings. It might seem excessive with formats that rarely get to 20kHz themselves, but keeping filtering as far away from the audioband as possible is consistently beneficial. Another useful feature is a toggle switch for recording gain offering 0, -6 or -12dB with a light that tells you whether the incoming digital signal is clipping.

There are S/PDIF inputs for digital sources and a pair of analogue inputs, a line up that should be sufficient for most systems. It also has a dedicated headphone amplifier which will work with a wide range of impedances; you rarely see a reference to this critical factor, but Furutech specifies that it will drive 32 to 600 ohm designs.

Sound quality

If I had to sum this component up in one word, it would be *precise*. It is a master of definition with a taut and clean presentation that is strong on leading edges, yet manages to keep them pristine. The flipside is that it is not as rounded and richly detailed as it might be, you get all the edges but not the subtle colouring of the tonal range being portrayed.

The best balance for it would be a rich loudspeaker and/or amplifier, it

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Furutech ADL Esprit

ORIGIN:
Japan/China

TYPE:
DAC/preamplifier

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
150x57x141mm

WEIGHT:
900g

- FEATURES:**
- analogue inputs: 2x RCA phono
 - digital inputs: asynchronous USB, coax, TOSLINK
 - digital outputs: USB, TOSLINK
 - analogue inputs: 2x RCA phono
 - headphone amp with 6.3mm jack
 - DAC: 24-bit/192kHz
 - ADC: 24-bit/192kHz

DISTRIBUTOR:
Furutech

TELEPHONE:
01276 501 392

WEBSITE:
adl-av.com

might work a treat with valve amps for instance, especially those that are on the warm side. Given its price, however, it's a little harsh to expect it to excel across the board. The real bonus is speed. Not grainy, forward or edgy speed, but clean, controlled immediacy that brings the music alive whatever it might be.

It brings out the electric element in the music, the sense of a musician being in the room can be palpable with a good recording like Laura Marling's *A Creature I Don't Know*. This was achieved with the S/PDIF output of a Cyrus Stream XP Qx, which is a fine digital source and one that brings in a more fully figured sound if its own DAC and pre are employed, but that's a rather more expensive proposition.

With a USB source the sound is similar but not quite as detailed, but that's likely to be because of the computer source more than the input. On its own terms it's a very presentable USB DAC that delivers remarkable clarity and manages to deliver precise imaging from a good recording.

The Esprit delivers fine bass weight from all sources, you need a speaker like the Bowers & Wilkins 802 Diamond to let it through, but it was ever thus. But there's no hump in the upper bass to fill out a smaller speaker as can sometimes be heard with competitors.

Conclusion

The ADL Esprit is far better than its diminutive stature would suggest, the build quality gives the game away, however. The key to its appeal is the precision of its sound, this produces clear-cut imaging and spot-on timing, it gets very close to the best in this latter respect which makes for a lot of musical thrill power. It could be tonally richer, but careful choice of ancillaries makes up for this and you get an awful lot of what counts in a very nicely made box. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: High precision sound that majors on timing and imaging

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: No remote volume control

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Superb insight, forensic detailing and excellent spatial projection – plus brilliant build – justifies the premium price

FEATURES



OVERALL

