

## Teac

# HA-P50 headphone amplifier/DAC

**IF YOU'VE INVESTED** in a decent pair of headphones and hooked them up to your phone or tablet only to be underwhelmed by the sound quality, then the Teac HA-P50 headphone amplifier could be the answer. On its own, the audio output stage of most portable devices will struggle to drive a reasonable set of headphones, but with the help of a good DAC/headphone amp like this the improvement is apparent.

The HA-P50 is designed for use on the move, but it's equally at home as a desktop amp for listening to music on your PC. It can handle audio formats up to 24-bit/96kHz, though you'll need to download the Teac HR Audio Player app to use it with Apple devices.

It weighs in at 210g and measures 64 x 22 x 125mm (WxHxD) including the two fin-like protrusions that run along its sides and which are designed to protect the controls from accidental knocks. It's not the smallest or lightest headphone amp on the market, but the aluminium body feels reassuringly solid and it's clearly a well engineered piece of kit.

### Well connected

The HA-P50 is supremely simple to set up and use and connectivity is impressive with both USB and micro USB inputs, plus an optical digital input for a CD, DVD or Blu-ray player. It will interface with both iOS and Android portable devices using their standard link cables, but also comes with a micro USB cable for connecting to a laptop. Power comes from a 2100mAh lithium-ion battery that's charged via USB and which Teac claims will give you eight hours of use.

While overall it's a beautifully crafted device, I do have some minor niggles. Firstly, I find the USB power cable has a tendency to work itself loose when connected to my laptop, which sometimes prevents charging. My second gripe concerns the two rubber bands supplied for strapping it to the back of your phone for use on the move. I'm not



convinced – it feels like a rather inelegant solution that makes the combined package very unwieldy and tricky to fit in your pocket.

Sonically, the HA-P50 provides a significant enhancement over the standard audio output of a smartphone, tablet or computer. I use it with iPhone, iPad and laptop and the improvement is palpable. On their own you can feel the devices running out of steam, but with the DAC it's as though an audio veil is lifted – the soundstage opens up providing greater clarity and detail plus the bass becomes tauter with more punch.

A lossless CD rip of Coldplay's *Princess of China* is a tough ask for any audio system and it sounds pretty dreadful when played directly from my iPhone – flat, dull and lifeless. But I'm mightily impressed with the Teac's ability to transform the experience – the chorus soars and when Rihanna's vocals kick in it regains that ability to send shivers down my spine.

U2's *Achtung Baby* is also capable of giving any audio system a workout and the Teac doesn't come up short. The hi-tempo guitar riffs on *Even Better Than The Real Thing* sound harsh and distorted without it, but are smoother and more refined with its help. Bass is also much improved, less flabby and more controlled.

Its abilities with high-resolution 24-bit/96kHz classical and jazz downloads are equally impressive. Vivaldi's *Four Seasons – Spring* sounds tinny and scratchy when the headphones are driven directly from my laptop, but it loses this abrasive edge with the Teac in the audio chain. Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet in B Minor* reveals an extended bass and much greater texture.

Jazz tracks such as Alexis Cole's *Ain't We Got Fun* sound more real and the ambient quality improves; switch back to the unaided audio output and the sax and double bass lines get more muddled and constrained. It's quite a striking comparison that cruelly exposes my computer's audio limitations.

### Music and movement

If you're serious about listening to music on the move, the HA-P50 is an ideal companion device for your phone, iPod or tablet that will clearly enhance your audio experience. It has the added benefit of doubling as a desktop headphone amp when back home. At £299 it can't exactly be described as cheap, but it's a well-designed device that's a doddle to get to grips with and if you're looking for a headphone amp then this is a strong contender. **DH**

#### DETAILS

**PRICE**  
£299  
**CONTACT**  
08712 001996  
**WEBSITE**  
teac-audio.eu

**OUR VERDICT**  
★★★★★