



CD-DAC N31: Class A+

Designed to play “Red Book” CDs and, via its USB and other digital inputs, music files up to 24/192 and DSD64 (DoP), the Noble Line N31 is less a digital-audio Swiss Army knife than a luxuriantly attractive, 40lb monument to the idea of perfecting the playback of audiophilia’s best-loved digital formats. Built around the ESS Sabre 9018 DAC, the N13 offers a full-color 5" TFT display—the MBL player recognizes CD text and displays title information—and features an SDcard slot for firmware updates, a choice of three playback filters, and a remote handset that lights up before the person reaching for it has even touched it. Listening to CDs and even a CD-R through the N13 [N31], JA was impressed by the “sheer tangibility” of the MBL’s sound, noting that, with its Min filter engaged, the N31 “gracefully reproduced” one “overcooked” track, and that the differences among its three filters was “greater in degree than with other DACs.” Through the MBL’s USB inputs, even iPhones and iPads, their own volume controls disarmed by the MBL’s USB input, offered “excellent” sound quality. JA originally raised an eyebrow at the lack of a network port and the fact that the player’s filters can’t be selected via the remote handset, but both of these issues have been addressed in 2020 production with the optional Roon Ready Input Module. As with USB, the networked MBL rendered music with an excellent sense of overall drive and low-frequency impact, JA found, with low-level recorded detail well-resolved. JA concluded his original review by saying that digital sound “doesn’t get any better” than what he heard from the N31. He also noted that the MBL offered 21 bits of resolution—the current state of the art of digital audio. This prompted JA the measurer to agree with JA the listener: “Digital audio engineering doesn’t get any better.” Price is with factory-installed Roon Ready network module. Price without module is \$15,400. (Vol.41 No.2, Vol.43 No.12 WWW) \$15,400