

# FURUTECH

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ADL GT40α Review

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## Alpha Design Labs GT40α

**A**lpha Design Labs, or ADL for short, is the audio components arm of Furutech, best known for its high-end cables, power products and accessories. The ADL GT40α is a USB DAC with a built-in phono stage and a headphone amp – an exceedingly useful combination of features that allows an equally versatile array of applications.

To me the GT40α is a headphone amp first and foremost, which also explains its compact, desktop-suited form factor. In that role, it accepts digital and analogue signals, the former via asynchronous USB, the latter via a stereo RCA input set.

The RCA inputs can accommodate either conventional line level sources or a turntable, by invoking an internal phono stage that is both

An additional feature of the GT40α carried over from the previous model is its ability to convert analogue source signals digital files by utilising an integrated analogue-to-digital converter. The GT40α employs the Cirrus Logic CS4270 DAC/ADC chip to ramp up ADC capability to 192 kHz/24-bit resolution.

The amplifier section still features a top-notch Class AB design with high-quality analogue circuitry, and is capable of accommodating a wide range of dynamic stereo headphones, including those presenting challenging loads of up to 300 ohms.

A stereo RCA output set is also provided. It's disabled when headphones are in use, but otherwise can present an analogue output signal

to meticulous design and execution.

I reviewed the GT40α in conjunction with my Sennheiser HD800 reference headphones, which present the exact 300 ohm impedance challenge the ADL is so eager to accept. A Linn Sondek LP12/Lingo/Ittok/Benz Micro Wood L2 acted as the analogue source, while I fed the USB input with my 13-inch MacBook running OS X Mavericks, utilising Audirvana Plus 1.12.5 playback software.

The Mac instantly recognized the GT40α, as well as its USB Audio Class 2.0 status, with Audirvana confirming its 192 kHz/24-bit playback capability. Interestingly, Audirvana also indicated DSD64 playback compatibility, but DSD64 files wouldn't work when I tried ...

In digital playback mode, the little GT40α sounded glorious: transparent, open and detailed,



moving coil and moving magnet cartridge-compatible.

The asynchronous USB input accepts digital feeds from a PC or Mac, and is now 192 kHz/24-bit capable. In fact, this is the biggest difference between the GT40α and the previous GT40, which was limited to 96 kHz/24-bit resolution only.

The phono stage has also been tweaked, and in MC mode, the loading is now reduced to a more widely compatible 100 ohms, while it remains at the universally accepted 47 kOhms for moving magnet cartridges.

to, for instance, a pair of active loudspeakers, or a power amp. Volume is adjusted via the large rotary controller on the front fascia.

All of this highlights the tremendous versatility of the GT40α, all from a small but beautifully executed all-aluminium alloy enclosure that exudes an unmistakable aura of crafted quality. Comprehensive shielding, quality internal wiring, gold-plated and Teflon-insulated RCA connectors and selected, low-noise op amps all point

with a pervasive sense of momentum and effortless flow. The Sennheisers were never allowed to stymie the tempo of the music, and found themselves properly exercised in the ADL's company – to the benefit of the overall performance.

Trebles were fresh and zesty, allowing loads of insight and close attention to detail, while also providing a bountiful harvest of spatial clues vital to the creation of an expansive, three-dimensional soundstage.

It also meant that there was an honesty and a purposefulness to the ADL's approach



that rewarded well recorded music, but could be deemed a little critical of lesser recordings, and even MP3s.

The midrange was sleek and vivid, never straying into rich opulence, but delivering both texture and tempo in abundance, and paying particular attention to finer tonal graduations and subtleties, while the bass was incisive and punchy, really reaching down low and exploring the low-frequency capabilities of the HD800's generous transducers.

As already alluded to, staging was exceptional, creating more of a forward-biased sonic picture than is usual for headphone sound, together with an immersive sense of dimension that made for thoroughly engaging listening.

Paula Cole's drama-drenched, evocative performances on *This Fire* might border on being too poppy for some, but the combination of catchy hooks, spacious sonic landscapes and attentive recording remains compelling. But Cole can also sound sharp and even shrieky on lesser systems.

The GT40α kept things nicely in check, revelling in the recording's lucidity. The upper frequencies never sounded overbearing, yet lost none of their inherent zing, while at the other end of the scale, bass and percussion were delivered with power and precision.

Peter Gabriel's eponymous first solo album remains one of his best, not only because of the widely lauded 'Solsbury

Hill', but because it also contains less recognised classics such as the evocative 'Here Comes The Flood' and 'Waiting For The Big One'.

It's a set filled to the brim with fine slivers of detail all too easily overlooked, but the GT40α kept an unwavering eye on the musical proceedings, capturing the full impact and essence of the music, and even doing real justice to the scale and grandeur of the London Symphony Orchestra's contributions.

Turning to vinyl, the GT40α delivered a no-nonsense, transparent and generally satisfying performance – not in the league of top-class phono stages such as the Valve Audio Whisper or Sutherland 20/20, but workmanlike and lucid enough to ensure an accurate, enjoyable performance, and useful as a result.

Certainly, this alpha version sounded better than its predecessor with MC-equipped turntables, showing plenty of energy and sparkle, and rewarding quality vinyl with a smooth, rich and generally musical delivery that accurately reflected why vinyl remains so approachable and enjoyable.

However, to utilise the ADC capability of the GT40α as far as digitising vinyl material is concerned, I'd suggest using the ADL's line-level inputs in conjunction with a turntable and a more talented off-board phono stage.

The ADL GT40α builds on the excellence of its predecessor, linking 192 kHz/24-bit

capability and an improved phono stage to an excellent DAC and a powerful, tonally lucid and seamlessly musical headphone amp.

As before, I missed a remote control, especially to adjust volume, and for some, the inherent clarity of the GT40α's delivery may be a little too bright. But those small reservations aside, this is a highly talented, versatile and beautifully constructed all-rounder.

Deon Schoeman

## VITAL STATS

Digital conversion .....	192 kHz/24-bit Cirrus Logic CS4270
Frequency response ...	20 Hz to 20 kHz (±0,5 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	> 90 dB, A-weighted (line output)
Output level .....	1 Vrms
MM/MC .....	Selectable. MC: 0,4 mV, MM: 4 mV
Loading ..	.47 kOhm (MM), 100 ohms (MC)
Inputs ...	Phono, line, asynchronous USB
Outputs .....	Line, headphone jack, USB
Dimensions (WxDxH)	..... 150 x 111 x 57 mm
Weight .....	..... 650 g
Price .....	R5 950

### Verdict

Extended high-res capability brings the GT40 in line with current trends, while phono stage now supports selectable 100 ohm loading. Velvety, appealing sonics and a talent for generous staging remain core attractions.

### Supplied by

AV Cables  
012-549-3015

### e-Mail

info@avcables.co.za

### Website

www.avcables.co.za

OUR RATING: 86 / 100

