MÉTRONOME

# TEST & REVIEW

# AQWO 2

## Hybrid DAC + SACD/CD + Streamer




Diapason

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In 2023, the public discovered AQWO 2 CD/SACD/DAC network player, designed with a clear mission: to outperform the 2018 AQWO — “the best-selling product in Métronome’s history.”
With AQWO, the manufacturer based in Montans (Tarn) introduced SACD playback to its universe; with AQWO 2, it added network playback and Ethernet/wifi streaming, making the machine a truly universal player, comparable to the very few equivalents on the market, such as the T+A MP 3100 HV.

The innovations don’t stop there. Its significantly larger and heavier chassis (W×H×D: 42.5 × 13 × 43.5 cm; 17 kg) requires careful consideration during installation—especially since it must also accommodate a wide and potentially bulky range of connectors.




It features four DAC inputs (S/PDIF, Toslink, AES/EBU, USB-C), an RJ45 network port, a USB-A port for maintenance, and an antenna connector for wifi. There are also three digital outputs (AES/EBU, S/PDIF, I2S), along with left/right audio outputs in both RCA and XLR formats. Completing the setup are an IEC power socket with fuse and a main power switch.

## Universal and Customizable

The entirely new electronics include a substantial power supply system with four toroidal transformers and a multitude of rectifiers and filtering capacitors.
Compatible with Tidal, Spotify, Qobuz, Deezer, and internet radio via vTuner, the universal player decodes native files up to PCM 384 kHz and DSD512, as well as MQA.
The top-loading CD/SACD mechanism is a D&M Group unit, modified by Métronome.

Massive in build, the mechanism is suspended to ensure complete immunity for the disc, which is held in place on the spindle by a magnetic Delrin clamp.
The dual-mono 32-bit / 768 kHz converter, based on ESS Sabre ES9039MPro chips, is preceded by a configurable oversampling stage supporting up to DSD256.
Similarly, the DAC’s impulse response can be tailored with a choice of eight digital filter modes.

## Listening Experience

Also new is a large 7-inch color touchscreen with a 1024×700 pixel resolution, which displays playback data and cover art for streamed albums, and also allows intuitive navigation through the menus—a much more comfortable experience than using the remote control.
First test with a CD, and first positive impression: those who own a large and valuable CD collection—as many music lovers do—could choose AQWO 2 for that purpose alone.

The sound of the player in this mode deserves high praise. Beyond its complete transparency, it delivers a sense of space and openness that brings credibility, scale, expressiveness, and structure to the music.
Anchored and precise, the sounds offer beautiful note decay and flawless spatialization.

Using the DSD256 oversampling mode enhances openness and finesse. And if, like our test unit, AQWO 2 is equipped with the optional output board featuring two 6922 double-triode tubes delivering up to 3 V, the analog sound signature claimed by the manufacturer becomes clearly perceptible.

More surprisingly, the DSD256 oversampling also enhances SACDs originally mastered in DSD64 (and the tube mode as well).

And what about streaming? While it doesn't quite match the performance of Métronome's dedicated streamer (see issue no. 738), AQWO 2 comes very close—and, importantly, adds the convenience of color display.
Upsampling here also makes a noticeable difference, to the point that comparing the same excerpt played from CD or streamed from Qobuz shows only a slight advantage for the CD.
The dual-mono DAC certainly contributes to this overall excellent performance and to a sense of freedom or "unshackling" of the musical message that is characteristic of AQWO 2.
More impactful on the final result than the effect of the eight filter modes, the upsampling and tube output humanize the sound reproduction to the extent that they become indispensable.
This latter option, which can always be added later, gives the name's root—derived from the ancient Greek verb akouo, meaning "I hear well"—its true meaning.
And guarantees that the listener is captivated from the very first notes.