MÉTRONOME

TEST & REVIEW

AQWO 2 Range

AQWO 2 - AQWO 2+ - t|AQWO 2 - c|AQWO 2









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Jul 16, 2025

The Métronome AQWO 2 range is undoubtedly the most iconic product line from the French high-fidelity workshop Métronome Technologie. During a visit to Métronome Technologie, the media outlet sempre-audio.at had the unique opportunity to explore behind the scenes of the development and manufacturing processes, and to directly compare all the models in the range.

From the very beginning, the company has been recognised as an undisputed digital specialist, dedicating its expertise first and foremost to solutions such as D/A converters, streaming systems, and CD and SACD players and transports. Each of these creations reflects a pursuit of excellence, built on the latest technologies and the remarkable expertise of its engineers.

A company with a long history

Métronome Technologie can proudly look back on a well-established history dating back to 1987. However, it was in 2014 that a new chapter began, with the arrival of a new management team that laid the foundations for the company as it is known today.

Under the leadership of Jean-Marie Clauzel, the product range was gradually restructured, resulting in the current offering. The team grew over the years, and in 2016, the company moved into its current premises. Facing continuous growth, these facilities had to be expanded a gain in 2019 to support the sustained development of Métronome Technologie.

In just a few years, Métronome Technologie transformed from a company mainly recognized on the French hi-fi scene to an internationally renowned brand in high-end audio, becoming one of the leaders in digital audio.

The Métronome Technologie product range



Métronome Technologie offers a particularly extensive product range, especially considering that, despite its international success, it is a relatively small company that designs and manufactures all its devices in-house, directly at its Montans facility.

The Métronome DS range

The Métronome DS range is undoubtedly the one targeting the widest audience.

DS here stands for Digital Sharing, a name chosen by Métronome to designate solutions designed to offer simplified handling of digital sources while guaranteeing the highest sound quality. These devices are conceived as plug & play solutions for audiophiles, combining accessibility and performance.
The range currently includes:

- ✓ DST - CD transport
- ✓ DSS 2 - Network player and streamer
- ✓ DSC mini - DAC
- ✓ and soon, DSAS - Music server.

All these complementary devices allow seamless management of digital files from different sources, within a coherent audiophile ecosystem.

The Métronome CLASSICA range

The Métronome CLASSICA range embodies the longest heritage of the brand, with some models tracing their origins nearly back to the beginnings of Métronome Technologie. It includes devices designed according to the brand's core principles: cutting-edge technology, sober and timeless design, and impeccable build quality.

This range reflects what high-fidelity means to Métronome: sonic refinement combined with artisanal excellence. It particularly highlights the analog sound signature characterizing all its models: a warmth and musicality sought after by disceming audiophiles.

The CLASSICA range consists of the following devices:

- ✓ Le Player 4 - CD transport
- ✓ Le Player 4+ - Hybrid CD player with DAC
- ✓ Le DAC 2 - Digital-to-analog converter
- ✓ Le Streamer - Network player

The Métronome AQWO range

The Métronome AQWO range holds a very special place within the Métronome Technologie universe. Since its launch in 2018, it has established itself as the brand's most accomplished and iconic series.

This success is no accident. Métronome considers this line the truest expression of its philo-

sophy: everything is designed for exceptional sound quality without compromise, combined with a timeless and distinctive design.

The brand describes this range as iconic and instantly recognizable, with unique lines that perfectly embody Métronome's visual identity. The embedded technology is state-of-the-art and the engineers enjoy almost complete freedom in design, with the absolute goal of achieving sonic perfection without compromising manufacturing standards.

The name AQWO itself is derived from the ancient Greek word akouo, meaning "to hear well," a clear nod to the purpose of this range, which stands as Métronome Technologie's flagship.

The AQWO range currently consists of four high-end models:

AQWO 2 - Hybrid DAC/SACD/CD player with streaming function
AQWO 2+ - Version featuring an extemal power supply
t|AQWO 2 - SACD transport with extemal power supply
c|AQWO 2 - D/A converter with extemal power supply

The entire Métronome AQWO 2 range brought together for a unique comparison



During a visit to Métronome Technologie, we had the rare opportunity to once again explore behind the scenes of the company, engage in in-depth discussions with the engineers, observe the meticulous work of the production teams - and above all, to directly compare all current models in the Métronome AQWO 2 range.

In the fully equipped listening room at the Montans facility, we were able to audition the four references under real-world conditions:

- ✓ AQWO 2 - Hybrid DAC/SACD/CD player with streaming function
- ✓ AQWO 2+ - Enhanced version
- ✓ t|AQWO 2 - SACD transport
- ✓ c|AQWO 2 - D/A converter

Alongside the development team, an extended comparative listening session highlighted the subtile differences between each model - a rare deep dive into Métronome's sonic expertise.

Review of Métronome AQWO 2 - Hybrid DAC, SACD/CD Player and Streamer

With AQWO 2, Métronome offers a particularly versatile solution within its flagship range. This model can be seen as a truly universal system for digital audio playback, regardless of the source. AQWO 2 brings together, in one elegant unit, a CD/SACD player, a network streamer, and a digital-to-analog converter (DAC) - a rare combination that makes it an ideal control center for demanding audiophiles.

Métronome Technologie acknowledges that developing AQWO 2 - a hybrid DAC, SACD/CD player, and streamer - was no easy task. The first generation had already achieved great success: the AQWO Hybrid DAC + SACD/CD even became the brand's best-selling product of all time. The position of Métronome's engineers has often been likened to that of a band trying to follow up a wildly successful album - the pressure to deliver a worthy sequel is high. To meet that challenge, the development team decided to start from scratch, with a clear ambition: to rethink everything in order to do even better, using the latest technologies and without limiting themselves to existing solutions.



The heart of AQWO 2 - a hybrid DAC, SA CD/CD player and streamer - is a transport mechanism developed by the D&M group, also found in high-end Hi-Fi systems from Denon and Marantz. However, Métronome Technologie's engineers have fully optimized and adapted it into a top-loading design, in line with the brand's mechanical philosophy.

The result: true bit-perfect playback for both standard CDs and Super Audio CDs, just as Métronome Technologie promises.

When it cornes to streaming, Métronome AQWO 2 Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer relies primarily on UPnP, the only true industry standard. This allows users to choose from a wide range of compatible apps available for both Apple iOS and Google Android. Métronome Technologie itself recommends the mConnect app, available on both platforms.

But of course, UPnP is just the beginning: AQWO 2 also supports Apple AirPlay, TIDAL via TIDAL Connect, Spotify via Spotify Connect, and Qobuz directly via Qobuz Connect. It is also Roon Ready certified and proudly bears the Plāys with Audirvāna label, ensuring direct integration with the Audirvāna software solution. Most recently, AQWO 2 received JPLAY certification, enabling seamless compatibility with that platform as well.

Network connectivity is provided either via the built-in Wi-Fi module or through a Gigabit Ethernet RJ45 interface. Signal processing is handled by a digital-to-analog converter from ESS Technology Inc., specifically the ESS ES9038Pro - a high-end DAC capable of decoding linear PCM signals up to 32-bit/384 kHz (DXD format), as well as DSD up to DSD512. Optional upsampling can be applied to further enhance playback quality.

These high-end D/A conversion capabilities are also available for extemal sources, which can be connected via optical or coaxial S/PDIF, or through an AES/EBU interface. For PC or Mac connections, AQWO 2 includes a USB-B port. It is also worth noting that AQWO 2 features both balanced and unbalanced analog outputs, along with a range of digital outputs. In addition to a coaxial S/PDIF output, it offers an AES/EBU output and an HDMI port for I^2S digital output.

Moreover, AQWO 2 includes an optional tube output stage, giving users the choice between a solid-state or tube-based output path.

Special attention was given to the power supply, which Métronome Technologie considers a critical factor in achieving optimal audio quality. At its core is a toroïdal transformer equipped with Schaffner filters, while ten independent voltage regulators distribute power to the various internal components.

All of this is housed in a timeless, elegant chassis made of thick aluminum panels, available in silver, black, or even gold finish.
According to the technical specifications, AQWO 2 measures 425 x 130 x 415 mm and weighs an impressive 17 kg. The front panel features a large 6.5-inch touchscreen display that shows all essential information and ensures intuitive operation.

Métronome AQWO 2+: Hybrid DAC SACDICD Streamer with External Power Supply on Test



While AQWO 2, previously described, made its debut at the High End 2023 show in Munich, it was at High End 2024 - one year later - that all eyes turned to the Métronome AQWO 2+ Hybrid DAC / SACD / CD Streamer. This new model was not designed to replace AQWO 2, but rather to expand the Métronome AQWO lineup.

According to Métronome Technologie, AQWO 2+ is an alternative to AQWO 2, aimed at the most demanding audiophiles - with the goal of taking what was already excellent and elevating it even further. Essentially, AQWO 2+ is based on AQWO 2, with one key difference, which we will explore in more detail. Like its

sibling, it combines a hybrid SACD transport, a network player, and a high-end D/A converter in a single unit.

Interestingly, AQWO 2+ was developed in direct response to strong customer demand. Many users wanted to unlock even more of AQWO 2's potential and exceed the already outstanding performance of the standard version - through the use of an external power supply.

Métronome Technologie has always believed that power supply quality is a fundamental factor in high-end audio performance. It was therefore a natural step to design a version with an even more refined, even more sophisticated power supply than the one found in the original AQWO 2.

An external power supply like this offers the designers not only more freedom in circuit layout - thanks to the increased internal space - but also aims to eliminate, from the outset, any negative influence the power stage might have on the delicate signal processing, whether from mechanical or electromagnetic interference.

The external power unit, named Métronome Elektra, was naturally designed to match the main device in both style and dimensions, forming a perfectly coherent ensemble.

A look inside Métronome Elektra reveals just how cleverly and meticulously a power supply can be engineered to deliver optimal performance.

Each circuit in AQWO 2+ benefits from its own dedicated power rail, using only the highest-quality components throughout. This is precisely why an AQWO 2 cannot simply be upgraded to AQWO 2+.

Although both models share the same functionalities, the internal architecture of AQWO 2+ is fundamentally different - significantly more complex - and divided between the main unit and the external power supply. The player itself measures 420 x 120 x 425 mm and weighs 13.3 kg, while the Métronome Elektra power supply cornes in at 420 x 85 x 425 mm and weighs 12.6 kg.

Métronome t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter on Test

Those who believe that AQWO 2+ represents the pinnacle of the AQWO range are only partially right. It certainly stands as the ultimate all-in-one solution, but it doesn't represent the full potential of what the Métronome AQWO lineup can achieve.

Alongside the launch of AQWO 2+, Métronome Technologie also introduced two new specialized devices: t|AQWO 2, the SACD transport, and c|AQWO 2, the D/A converter. Both units have been available since mid-2024.



Designed to operate independently - either as a dedicated CD/SACD transport or as a high-end DAC - they can also be paired to form a perfectly complementary duo. Together, they offer the same functionalities as the all-in-one AQWO models, but with even greater flexibility and higher performance potential.

The release of the se two new components is fully in line with Métronome Technologie's strategy, already implemented during the first generation of the AQWO range. Back then, the original t|AQWO (SACD transport) and c|AQWO (D/A converter) were designed for audiophiles looking for a distinct, specialized solution for each task.

With the t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter pairing, Métronome's engineers had the freedom to design each device without compromise. Their goal was clear: to push the AQWO range to its highest level of sonic and technical excellence.

According to Métronome, apart from their name and their timeless, understated design, these two new-generation devices have little in common with their predecessors. In every key area, they offer significant improvements and new possibilities.

It' s worth noting that the new t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport uses the same SACD reading mechanism as its predecessor. According to Métronome, there was little room for improvement in that area. However, the electronics have seen major advancements.

This is particularly true when it comes to connectivity: Métronome has prioritized an HDMI port, used here for transmitting digital audio via the FS protocol. According to Métronome Technologie, this is the best possible option, as it enables bit-perfect transmission of linear PCM signals up to 32-bit / 384 kHz, as well as native DSD streams up to DSD256.

As alternatives, a coaxial S/PDIF output and an AES/EBU output are also available. However, an optical S/PDIF output has been deliberately left out, as Métronome considers it by far the least effective solution for transmitting high-quality digital audio.

As mentioned earlier, c|AQWO 2 can certainly be used as a standalone D/A converter in a wide range of setups. Still, Métronome Technologie primarily recommends it as the ideal partner for the t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport.

This new c|AQWO 2 has been completely re-engineered, with one of the most notable upgrades being the presence of two distinct DACs: one from ESS Technology Inc., and the other from Asahi Kasei Microdevices Corporation. Specifically, it integrates the ESS ES9039M PRO and the AKM 4499EX converters, between which the user can freely switch - allowing access to the unique filtering and upsampling options of each DAC architecture.

What might sound simple is, in fact, a significant technical challenge. Each D/A converter requires a completely different design approach to ensure optimal performance. For both DACs, Métronome's engineers had to develop and integrate fully separate circuit designs within the c|AQWO 2.

Regardless of which DAC is used, c|AQWO 2 is capable of processing linear PCM signals up to 32-bit / 384 kHz, DSD up to DSD512, and MQA compressed streams.

Métronome Technologie clearly states that when used with t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport, c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter should prioritize the I^2S connection via the proprietary HDMI interface, which is considered the only correct option. For other sources, the converter of course also offers optical and coaxial S/PDIF interfaces, an AES/EBU input/output, as well as a USB-B port for direct connection to a PC or Mac.

Both t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter operate with an external power supply.

As previously mentioned, these devices were engineered without compromise to achieve optimal quality. The external power supply ensures that each critical component has its own voltage regulator and, by physically separating the power source from the sensitive signal processing-whether digital or analog-it eliminates any detrimental interference at the source, preserving sound quality.

Interestingly, both t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter can optionally be equipped with a streaming board. This may seem unusual at first glance, but upon closer inspection, it proves to be a well-considered feature. When used together, the user can choose which of the two devices will host the streaming module. Some may prefer to install it in only one unit, and in either case, full streaming functionality is available.



With this module, t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter systems feature a Wi-Fi module compliant with the IEEE 802.11ac standard, as well as a Gigabit RJ45 Ethernet interface for network connection. They can stream content as UPnP clients with DLNA certification, controllable via various apps for Apple iOS and Google Android. They also support Apple AirPlay, as well as TIDAL via TIDAL Connect, Spotify via Spotify Connect, and Qobuz via Qobuz Connect. Métronome Technologie's streaming module is also Roon Ready certified by Roon Labs LLC, carries the Plāys with Audirvāna certification from the French company Audirvāna SAS, and is JPLAY certified, enabling direct integration with JPLAY software.

It's also worth noting that a USB-A port allows the use of storage devices as audio sources.

Only c|AQWO 2 can optionally be equipped with a tube output stage, giving the user, just like with the all-in-one AQWO series systems, the ability to switch at any time between solid-state circuitry and tube output.
t|AQWO 2 measures 430 mm wide, 120 mm high, and 420 mm deep, with a weight of 13.2 kg. Its associated power supply measures 420 mm wide, 80 mm high, and 430 mm deep, weighing 14 kg.
clAQWO 2 has the same width (430 mm), height (120 mm), and depth (420 mm), with a weight of 12 kg. Its power supply also measures 420 mm wide, 80 mm high, and 430 mm deep, with a weight of 12.7 kg. AQWO 2 has the same width (430 mm), height (120 mm), and depth (420 mm), with a weight of 12 kg. Its power supply also measures 420 mm wide, 80 mm high, and 430 mm deep, with a weight of 12.7 kg.

A Day at Métronome Technologie in Montans



As mentioned in the introduction, we had the exclusive opportunity to spend an entire day with the developers of Métronome Technologie at their workshops in Montans, to explore in detail the entire Métronome AQWO 2 range and the specific features of each model.

What was particularly fascinating was to observe the meticulousness, even the relentlessness, with which the engineers dedicate themselves to their work. Every detail, even those that seem insignificant at first glance, receives extreme attention. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is left to chance in the quest to achieve the best possible results.

We were especially struck by the enthusiasm with which the Métronome Technologie developers explain their technical choices: why a particular component was selected, and why it is placed exactly at that specific location on the circuit board. As mentioned before, no detail is overlooked, which partly explains the richness and diversity of the Métronome AQWO range.

Of course, even for a renowned high-end hi-fi manufacturer, certain constraints must always be taken into account during product development. Each device is designed to meet a specific price point. However, with the Métronome AQWO range, the company strives to avoid any compromise on quality.

The result is a clearly defined progression, from an all-in-one system, to an all-in-one alternative with an external power supply, and finally to a two-component setup forming a duo that stands as the ultimate reference.

And indeed, when you see all the circuit boards from the range laid out on a workbench in Métronome Technologie's ultra-modem workshop, it becomes easy to understand - through numerous details - what truly sets each system apart. At first glance, the devices may appear very similar, especially on paper where their functions largely overlap, but their design clearly reveals fundamental differences.

The full Métronome AQWO range in direct comparison - exclusive listening session at Métronome Technologie



The striking differences that small details can make became remarkably clear in the Métronome Technologie listening room, which was made available to us for several hours. This allowed us to thoroughly test and compare all the products from the current generation of the Métronome AQWO 2 range.

The saying "perfect is the enemy of good" takes on its full meaning here, even though the "entry-level" model in the range, the Métronome AQWO 2 Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer, already stands as a pinnacle of high-end audiophile design. Even the most demanding enthusiasts would struggle to find a flaw in it.

It's no surprise that AQWO 2 was, during our in-depth test, considered a clear benchmark, and this was at a time when the other models in the Métronome AQWO range hadn't even been announced yet.

However, when directly compared to its younger siblings - particularly its "brother," Métronome AQWO 2+, and especially the specialist duo formed by t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter, one might be tempted to downgrade AQWO 2 by a point or two. These latter models clearly represent the ultimate reference, the very pinnacle of available technology.

That said, this assessment only emerges through direct listening comparisons. The fact that the latest additions to the AQWO range are even better in no way diminishes the already evident excellence of the Métronome AQWO 2.

Only by directly comparing AQWO 2+ can one fully grasp how much an extemal power supply can further enhance sound quality. Likewise, it is only in a face-to-face comparison between AQWO 2+ and the combination of t|AQWO 2 with c|AQWO 2 that it becomes clear:

separate components, each with their own carefully engineered and independent power supply, rightfully represent the pinnacle - the audiophile's Holy Grail, as aptly described by Métronome Technologie.

There's no denying that AQWO 2 already stands among the best solutions on the market for anyone seeking a versatile device capable of handling digital audio at the highest level. It combines CD and Super Audio CD playback, modem streaming capabilities, and a flexible D/A converter in one unit.
It is only outperformed by AQWO 2+, whose external Elektra power supply brings even greater calm, depth, and refinement to the sound reproduction.

The true pinnacle, however, lies in the two-piece solution of t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport and c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter. When compared directly with all-in-one systems, a clear step up in sound quality becomes apparent with even greater precision, an added sense of serenity, and a subtile yet distinct improvement in dynamics.

Our Opinion



It's truly remarkable to see how passionate developers continue to improve what already seemed perfect, proving that the quest for absolute sonic perfection is far from over. A prime example is the Métronome AQWO range, whose latest generation was introduced by the French high-end audio house Métronome Technologie, beginning with Métronome AQWO 2 Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer. This model made a strong impression with its rich functionality and timeless, elegant design, quickly becoming a benchmark.

Then came Métronome AQWO 2+ Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer, through which Jean-Marie Clauzel and his team succeeded in further elevating an already outstanding product. And the story doesn't end there: with the two specialist components - Métronome tlAQWO 2 SACD Transport and Métronome c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter - the bar was raised yet again, pushing the boundaries of sonic perfection even further.

AQWO 2 Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer already struck us as a precision instrument, offering a flawless foundation for the highest levels of musical enjoyment. lts "siblings", AQWO 2+ Hybrid DAC SACD/CD Streamer and t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport paired with c|AQWO 2 D/A Converter, deliver even greater serenity in playback, resulting in added detail and enhanced dynamics.

Whether one chooses AQWO 2, AQWO 2+, or the t|AQWO 2 and c|AQWO 2 duo, each solution performs at an exceptional level of quality. And every product in the Métronome AQWO range clearly illustrates why this line is the most advanced and successful ever created by the French manufacturer Métronome Technologie.

- ✓ AQWO 2: €19,990
- ✓ AQWO 2+: €26,800
- ✓ c|AQWO 2 DIA Converter: €29,350
- ✓ t|AQWO 2 SACD Transport: €30,650
- ✓ Streaming module for c|AQWO 2 and t|AQWO 2: €2,000
- ✓ Tube output stage option: €2, 190