

## TRENDS AUDIO-10 LITE/TA-10

# Pocket audio takes centre stage for the study system

James Vesey gets to grips with laptop hi-fi with the ability to perform way beyond its compact dimensions

These days music enthusiasts are as likely to be considering a computer as the source for their system as a CD player. With the falling price of computer storage making less compressed file formats easy to keep on a hard drive, and broadband internet access speeding up the downloading of large files, it's as simple – and a lot more convenient – to buy downloads of music rather than ordering CDs online and waiting for them to be delivered.

I have of late been using my laptop computer as a means of playing music from internet radio stations, or played on the CD player built into it, through some small powered speakers in the study, so it was with interest that I started to look at some devices designed for just such a set-up, made by Hong Kong-based Trends Audio, and available by direct mail order.

The UD-10.1 Lite digital-to-analogue converter uses Burr-Brown PCM2704 conversion, housed in a case not much bigger than a packet of cigarettes. It has conventional electrical and optical digital inputs, and also a USB connection, using which it can take both signal and power from a computer.

Output is via a 3.5mm stereo socket, with an adapter supplied to convert to standard phono sockets, and the device also comes with a battery holder and four rechargeable batteries, plus a mains charger. The batteries should be good for about 16 hours' use, or you could add a 5V power supply and run the unit from the mains.

The UD-10.1 Lite sells for HK\$920, or about £80, plus shipping, while housed in a slightly larger case, and selling for HK\$1395, or around £120, is the company's TA-10 amplifier. This is powered by a larger mains adapter, providing a 12V output, and has no more than a single pair of phono inputs, output for two speakers, a volume control and a little on/off switch on the rear. It's a Class-T amplifier, using Tripath's Digital



Power Processing technology to deliver a 2x15W output: not the kind of power to shake a huge room, but more than enough for small speakers of reasonable sensitivity on a desktop.

### PERFORMANCE

I tried the two devices together, with a budget laptop as a source and a variety of speakers on the end of the amplifier, and I also used each of the devices separately with other components. Their combination of price, compact dimensions and sheer cuteness make them highly attractive.

Yes, there are better DACs than the UD-10.1 Lite on the market, including some with USB inputs, but they all cost more than the Trends unit – some many times more. It's for that reason one can forgive the very slightly lightweight sound on offer here; the UD-10.1 may be a little thin in the bass in absolute terms, but it sounds

much better than any computer's built-in audio output, and gets so much right in terms of detail and ambience that it's hard not to like.

The same is true of the little TA-10 amplifier: it has limited power output and speaker-driving ability, but in small-room systems this is a very persuasive amplifier, delivering fine bass and a credible midband and treble. The balance is slightly on the warm side, with a slight softening in the extreme high frequencies and a little low-down bloom, but that won't go amiss with the small speakers with which it's likely to be used.

Similarly the limited specification – only one input, no remote control and so on – could be put in the minus column, but then this amp is likely to be used on a desktop, between a computer and some nearfield speakers.

I enjoyed my time with these compact, affordable products from Trends Audio; I hadn't heard of the company before, and I'm still not ready to give up my main system, but for desktop audio they have a lot going for them. ☺

### TRENDS AUDIO UD-10.1 LITE

**Type** USB DAC

**Price** approx £80

**Inputs** USB, optical and electrical digital

**Output** 3.5mm stereo analogue

**Accessories supplied** USB cable, 3.5mm-to-phonos adapter, battery pack, rechargeable batteries, charger

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 7.6x4.6x11.4cm

### TRENDS AUDIO TA-10

**Type** Stereo amplifier

**Price** approx £120

**Power output** (WxHxD) 2x15Wcm

**Inputs** Line stereo

**Outputs** 1pr speakers

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 7.6x4.6x15cm

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