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& Record Review

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Free  
KEF's fabulous 50th Anniversary book worth £55 when you subscribe to  
**hi-finews**  
See page 60



## Devialet Evolution

MORE SCOOP ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM MUNICH SHOW

Further to our exclusive review of the Devialet D-Premier AIR this month [p48] more details of the company's plans and product timeline have been revealed to *Hi-Fi News*.

'SAD (Swiss Audio Design) is merging with Devialet, resulting in eight engineers now working exclusively on R&D,' said a company spokesman. 'We are raising 10 million Euros this year and will announce a new financial partnership later this summer.'

The product platform is also being enhanced. Version 5.6 will include an iPhone app to control the D-Premier with display feedback; the AIR interface will handle 96kHz/24-bit audio with ad-hoc network support, extended Wi-Fi security protocols (WPA, WEP) and support of internet radio.

New balance and tone controls will be joined by universal IR and support for



non-RIAA phono EQ curves (Decca, Columbia, etc).

Version 5.7 will have HDMI activated and improved multi-amp support with 64-bit signal processing and live control of filtering/crossover parameters through a dedicated iPad app. **Absolute Sounds Ltd, 0208 971 3909; www.devialet.com**

## Get plugged in

RA ULTRASOCKET CLAIMS IMPROVED MAINS CONNECTION

Russ Andrews' new wall-mounted mains socket, the UltraSocket, is a replacement for the conventional mains socket faceplate. The device comprises a single centred 13A/250V rated outlet (to BS1363) in a high impact, fire-resistant material. High pressure, low resistance contacts accept conductors up to 5mm in diameter while faceplates to replace existing single or double sockets are available. The 'double' faceplate still has one socket as removing the connector bars is said to improve sound quality. The units are supplied – £79 single faceplate, £89 double – Deep Cryo Treated and with DeoxIT contact enhancer.

**Russ Andrews Accessories Ltd, 01539 797300; www.russandrews.com**



## Etude follows Curvi

A NEW STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKER FROM CML AUDIO

Back in Aug '10 we reviewed Dr Christopher Liauw's single-driver Curvi transmission line speaker. By contrast, his Etude 1 features twin Balanced Mode Radiator drive units, with its top 85mm unit driven full range and the identical lower one rolled off at HF. Baffle step diffraction equalisation filter design and voicing is by Christien Ellis of CE Electroacoustics.

The Etude 1 is a 10-litre sealed box standmount with quoted 87dB sensitivity and nominal 8ohm impedance, measuring 335x192x315mm (hwd). The cabinet is said to be acoustically inert, with a resulting realism 'hitherto only available from imposing electrostatic designs'. Finishes are satin white or black epoxy; the 12mm Corian front (a



baffle stiffening element) is also in white or black. Price is £1400 including UK delivery – contact [chris.liauw.curvi.hifi@googlemail.com](mailto:chris.liauw.curvi.hifi@googlemail.com).

**CML Audio, 0777 276 6465 / 0161 228 2853  
www.curvi-hifi.com**

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## Upcoming Events

IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR HI-FI DIARY

- 03-05 AUG** California Audio Show, Crowne Plaza, CA 94010; [www.caudioshow.com](http://www.caudioshow.com)
- 01-05 SEP** IFA 2012, Berlin Messe, Germany; [www.ifa-berlin.de](http://www.ifa-berlin.de)
- 22-23 SEP** National Audio Show, Northants; [www.chestergroup.org](http://www.chestergroup.org)
- 09 OCT** Audiojumble 2012, Angel Centre, Tonbridge, Kent; [www.audiojumble.co.uk](http://www.audiojumble.co.uk)



# Devialet D-Premier AIR (£12k each)

*Hi-Fi News* revealed this innovative 'ADH' amplifier to the world over two years ago since when it's grown in power output and flexibility. Time for an exclusive update  
 Review & Lab: **Paul Miller**

'Cut the cord' says Devialet by way of introduction to the D-Premier's most significant upgrade to date – a bespoke Wi-Fi interface with the potential to handle streamed, hi-res audio media. The unique combination of hardware and firmware that is the D-Premier 'Analogue/Digital Hybrid' amplifier has provided the perfect platform for a continuous and seemingly organic evolution since our inaugural review [*HFN*, Apr '10].

But let's jump to the front of the queue and discover what's so special about this new, embedded Wi-Fi receiver. For starters it's not just another Apple AirPlay module and although music is still navigated via an iTunes interface (a temporary workaround) it's Devialet's own AIR application that controls the streaming. So there's no chance of any unwanted sample rate conversion 'helpfully' provided by Core Audio (Mac OS) or Windows' Kernel Mixer.

## FIRST CLASS PACKET

Crucially, although the link between the media source and amp is wireless, Devialet's 802.11b/g/n Red Pine module (coupled with the latest 400MHz Analog Devices Sharc DSP) supports asynchronous file transfer with a single clock. And it's the clock in the D-Premier, not your computer, that governs the flow of data packets into the receiver's buffer before being clocked-out into the amplifier proper.

Provided there's been no irrecoverable dropout of one or more data packets, then the bitstream should be identical to one delivered via the D-Premier's hard-wired S/PDIF interface. Incidentally, the Wi-Fi signal strength, state of the buffer and data integrity (packets lost) are revealed in real-time via the AIR software utility that runs in parallel with iTunes.

At the time of writing, Devialet's AIR software (v1.3) supports streaming at

16-bit CD resolution with updates to accommodate 44.1/48kHz/24-bit (plus HDCD) files promised for May '12 and 88.2/96kHz/24-bit support slated for the year's end.

## D-PREMIER PRIMER

But what of the D-Premier itself, a sleek statement of the art partnered by an equally remarkable table-top RF remote? For those few who may have missed the initial excitement [see [www.hifinews.co.uk/news/article.asp?a=7605](http://www.hifinews.co.uk/news/article.asp?a=7605)], a brief recap is in order.

Designed and built in France, the D-Premier is a unique twist on Quad's 'feedforward' Class A/B Current Dumping technique, first applied in its 405 power amplifier some 37 years ago

[*Wireless World*, Dec 1975]. In Devialet's implementation, a very high quality analogue Class A (voltage) amplifier is directly coupled to the speaker while a digital Class D stage provides the current required to maintain this voltage across the speaker load. Hence the term 'ADH'.

It's the Class A voltage amp that defines the quality and performance of the amplifier as a whole, not the rugged Class D dumpers, and this includes the filtering of its high speed PWM switched output. So, unlike every other Class D amplifier, the D-Premier is free of an invasive LC filter network just ahead of its speaker outputs. As a result its performance remains unaffected by choice of speaker or load.

Since we first met the D-Premier, there have been numerous updates.



**RIGHT:** Exquisitely engineered, the D-Premier features a 600W switchmode/PFC PSU (top left), proprietary digital Class D current dumpers (centre) and Wi-Fi module (centre right)





The original 96kHz ADC that dealt with analogue inputs has been replaced with a 192kHz/24-bit part offering superb anti-aliasing; a secure bootloader for updating every internal processor was added and the RS232/trigger controls were enabled. Other firmware updates have brought claimed subjective benefits. These include a remapping of the switchmode PSU management to permit 2.1kW peaks, a similar optimisation of the Class D dumpers' output protection [see Lab Report, p51] and a change from 32-bit to 40-bit floating point maths in its core signal processing.

Devialet's online configuration tool was launched [see boxout, below] to facilitate daisy-chaining and dual mono support for multiple D-Premiers, as reviewed here. The 'Configurator' offers a fine-tuning of every input and output, right down to defining the vinyl reply characteristics, input loading

*'The musically difficult is teased apart with deft efficiency'*

and sensitivity of its digitising phono input. Few separate high-end phono amps offer this level of versatility, but when you've an amp that lives in the virtual world of software, almost anything is possible. To read about more last-minute 'scoop' updates for the D-Premier, turn to our News section on p6.

As a one-stop hub for your digital and analogue sources, the fully integrated ADH amplifier couldn't be simpler to install or operate – just add speakers! Personally, I can live without the HDMI loop-through, which has still yet to be enabled, but the lack of a USB 2.0 input does necessitate a DDC (digital-to-digital converter) for most PC/Mac users.

Few could have predicted the rise and rise of the USB interface in audio circles since the D-Premier's physical platform was cast some years ago. Adding a USB input

**ABOVE:** Seen here in traditional mirrored livery, the D-Premier is now also available in matt black and ivory finishes. In dual-mono mode, one amp becomes the 'Master', the other the 'Slave'

now would require a substantial revision to the D-Premier's real estate. All of which helps explain Devialet's drive to develop a universal Wi-Fi interface instead, and there has always been a riser on its main board ready for the purpose. Thankfully, that drawing board dream has now taken form [see inside shot, p48].

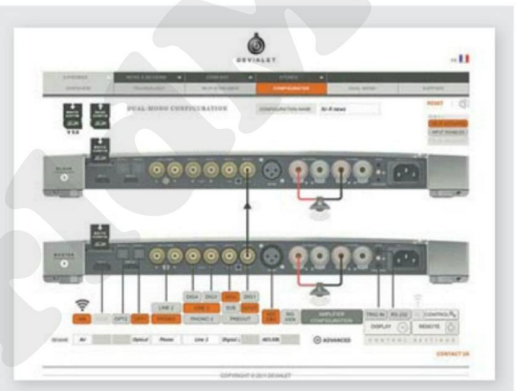
### **TAKING TO THE AIR**

Straight out of the box, and despite its current 48kHz/16-bit limitation, the 'wireless' D-Premier sounded significantly easier on the ear than other Wi-Fi streamers I'd previously auditioned.

Streaming CD-ripped WAVs via the iTunes interface/AIR application on my MacBook Pro, all the D-Premier hallmarks were there – huge extension, exquisite detailing and that sense of uniformity, ↻

## **THE CONFIGURATOR**

You don't need to own a D-Premier to explore its flexibility. Point your browser at [www.devialet.com/configurator](http://www.devialet.com/configurator) and Devialet's on-line configuration utility reveals just how easy it is to define not just the 'name' but the exact nature of what happens behind every input socket. The screenshot, opposite, shows the dual-mono set-up of the two D-Premiers reviewed here; our customised configuration defined, saved and loaded via SD cards (one for each amp) directly from the web page. The enabled inputs are coloured orange and our choices, from left to right, include the Wi-Fi AIR module and the S/PDIF Optical 1 input. The first set of RCA sockets are configured for LP duty with loading and sensitivity readily optimised for my Koetsu Black MC pick-up! A line-level analogue input and coaxial S/PDIF input follows while the two D-Premiers are daisy-chained via the final RCAs.





## AMPLIFIER



**ABOVE:** The amplifier is fully configurable in software [boxout, p49], all parameters loaded via an SD card slot (top left corner). The HDMI inputs are yet to be enabled

of natural musical interplay and unaffected wholesomeness that's so rarely experienced with hi-fi at any price. The wonderful duet of pianos and harmonies that marks the Elton John/Leon Russell *Union* [Mercury 2748480] sounded as lush and rich as ever, the intimate acoustic only slightly closer, perhaps slightly less crisp, than the same album delivered via a direct S/PDIF connection.

Nevertheless I was struck by the fact that a wireless stream of Eleanor McEvoy's *Alone* [MOSCD409] still exceeded my expectations. Her voice was crisp and articulate, the Fender Precision bass a deep, rolling throb that maintained the gentle insistence of tracks like 'What's Her Name?'. With never a hint of harshness or coarseness, its sound is a model of composure. And yet, even with a strong and uncluttered network, the AIR option still does not *quite* deliver the 'black' silences or authoritative dynamics of its direct S/PDIF connection. Tough competition, when you are competing in a class of one.

Until Devialet has genuine, 'hi-res' streaming nailed, if you really want to experience the D-Premier at its jaw-dropping finest, there's still nothing to beat a hard-wired connection. I regularly use the S/PDIF digital output of a Cambridge 751BD player streaming 24-bit content from an attached USB drive. A custom PC (with Samsung SS drives) and Musical Fidelity V-Link 192 USB-to-S/PDIF converter is another favoured route [see my system at [www.hifinews.co.uk/news/article.asp?a=9952](http://www.hifinews.co.uk/news/article.asp?a=9952)].

### THE REAL DEAL

Listening to 'The Other Side' from AM's *Future Sons And Daughters* [Naim 24-bit/48kHz download] provides a perfect illustration of the D-Premier's tremendous grip, not just over the 'musical macro' – the big dynamic swings, insightful vocals and the deep, resonant cadence of acoustic strings and drums – but also the micro detailing that separates something neutral but mundane

from the 'real deal'. And, believe me, with a *pair* of D-Premier amps in tow you have the opportunity to be placed at centre stage of a very real musical event.

Likely as not, you'll be transported too, as I was, into the other-worldly realm inhabited by Storm Corrosion's eponymous 24/96 release on Blu-ray [Road Runner RR7645-5]. This album has some especially dense and occasionally discordant interludes – 'Lock Howl' with the London Session Orchestra an example – but I never once suspected a hint of compression or fuzzy instrument modulation with the D-Premiers at the helm.

The musically difficult is not only rendered with deft efficiency but also great sensitivity, as tightly knotted strands are teased apart to reveal the true colour and rhythmic banter that always existed beneath a once-tangled instrumental mass.

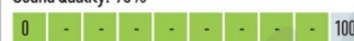
We all have recordings that we prefer not to play, those that are just too unsympathetic, too taxing for us to suspend disbelief and enjoy. It's worth digging these discs from under the dust and have the D-Premier clean away the patina of confusion. You never know what musical treasure might have been lying underneath for all these years.

Coherence from chaos – it's a neat trick, but just one of many the D-Premier has tucked up its sleeve. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

In early 2010, *Hi-Fi News*' world first review of the D-Premier declared it the 'outstanding amplifier thus far of the new Millennium' and nothing I've auditioned or lab tested in the meantime has caused me to alter this opinion. Now with wireless streaming a work in progress and user-programmable configuration as testament to its staggering flexibility, the D-Premier remains a unique audiophile proposition.

Sound Quality: 90%

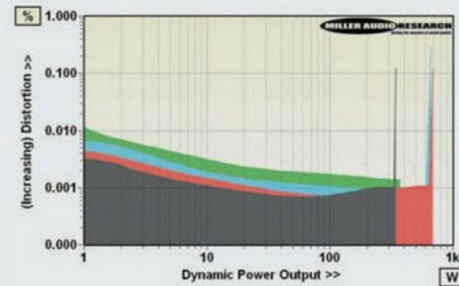


## LAB REPORT

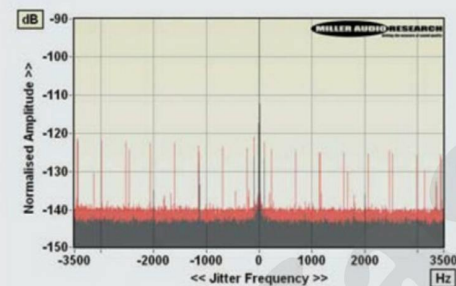
### DEVIALET D-PREMIER AIR (£12,000)

Comparisons with the extensive lab reports that accompanied our first review of the D-Premier [*HFN* Apr '10] are instructive because re-mapping the Class D modulators for bridged mono operation brings a very subtle change in distortion along with the added power. Voltage/current limitations are coded into its processors so, in fact, a bridged D-Premier delivers closer to 370W/8ohm than the 400W rated maximum, with 345W/690W into 8/4ohm loads under dynamic conditions. This is close to twice the output derived from a stereo D-Premier even though there's not a similar boost to output into lower 2/1ohm loads at 670W/380W. The instantaneous clipping behaviour and unusually load-invariant distortion trend that's a character of the amp is clear from Graph 1, below. Distortion is lower still through the digital inputs, down to 0.00018% to 0.0005% through the midrange at 1W-350W/8ohm. But distortion is just a little higher in bridged mode at very high frequencies (20kHz) – 0.048% with 48kHz inputs and 0.016% with 96kHz inputs.

Frequency response has extended and flattened out through all analogue and digital inputs since the D-Premier's introduction, now reaching 90kHz at –1dB (digital) and –20dB (analogue, –3dB/80kHz). The wireless AIR input is currently limited to a 20kHz bandwidth, but is flat within ±0.05dB and shows the same low 0.0002% distortion at 1kHz (re. 0dBfs/1W). The A-wtd S/N remains impressive at 95dB (re. 1W) and 120dB (re. 350W) while jitter is close to the measurable limit for 16-bit data [see Graph 2]. Readers may view in-depth QC Suite reports detailing the D-Premier's bridged mono performance (analogue, digital and wireless) by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'download' button. PM



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (cyan) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads for a bridged mono D-Premier



**ABOVE:** High resolution jitter spectra. CD-resolution audio over AIR (red) versus 48kHz/24-bit wired (black)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	360W / 700W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	345W / 690W / 670W / 380W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	0.001–0.009ohm
Frequency response (20Hz–80kHz)	+0.0dB to –3.0dB (analogue in)
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz re. 10W)	0.00018–0.016% (digital in)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBw/350W)	90.1dB / 115.5dB (120dB dig in)
Digital jitter (AIR/48kHz/96kHz)	130psec / 35psec / 50psec
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	30W/470W (7W Standby)
Dimensions (WHD)	400x44.5x400mm