

Sound centre for ■ HiRes Files

Accustic Arts
Player IV

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2024

100+
Luxury Class

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Accustic Arts Player IV

CONVERSION ARTIST FOR CD AND HIRES

Imposing noblesse ■





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Accustic Arts Player IV

Conversion Artist for CD and HiRes

The Player IV lets you live in the best of both worlds - by cultivating the art of visual and acoustic perfection: With superb top loader drive and accurate up-sampling technology, it shines resplendent as an audiophile CD player - making HiRes streaming from a digital player, computer or laptop possible via its USB port and three S/PDIF interfaces. Thanks to a fresh converter, Player IV now supports high-resolution files up to PCM 384 kHz/32 bit and DSD512 - and can also act as pure DAC or sheer CD transport via its analog and digital outputs. This remarkable conversion artist proves its sound culture in the test.

The dead live longer - hardly any medium is better suited to this phrase than the CD: The silver disk is still an integral part of the music library for most audiophiles, yet still proves to be a sought-after sound carrier - despite the dominance enjoyed by streaming: In Germany, the compact disk accounted for eleven percent of music recording sales last year. That's why there's still a need for excellent sampling and conversion components - and Accustic Arts has been meeting this demand for many years now with constantly maintained and developed "player" models. We've already tested the Player I and the Player III from the top series of the Lauffen high-end manufacturer, and the Player II from the reference series.



What really draws your gaze to the Player IV is the unique and elaborate realisation of the drive cover by a solid metal plate mounted and guided on rails.

Its successor is now the current Player IV. It gives us a feeling of déjà vu de luxe. That's because - with its massive material and the chrome/aluminium design characteristic of Accustic Arts - it maintains the same imposing appearance as its predecessor.

Imposing noblesse

This imposing elegance is also reflected in the weight: The Player IV weighs a whopping twenty kilos. The thick-walled aluminium housing - projected by a centimetre-thick front panel - plays a key role here. The surfaces are velvety and extraordinarily finely brushed, immaculately microlated and cleanly anodised - giving the Player IV a fine line pattern that exudes a noble shimmer. This noblesse is intensified by the high-gloss, chrome-plated controls and applications and perfected by the superb workmanship. Accustic Arts is known for this maximum material and manufacturing quality - and the Player IV in front of us also meets this demand. The absolute eye magnet is now the massive mechanism on the top: Mounted on two large-diameter, chrome-plated metal rails, a two-centimetre-thick plate of pure aluminium enjoys pride of



The quality of the materials and workmanship is simply excellent: The aluminium surfaces have a fine line pattern and shimmer gently, the applications and controls made of chrome-finished metal stand out with mirror-like high gloss. This supports the factory logo, which is now designed as a plaque instead of a milling.



Testurteil
2024

100+
Luxury Klasse

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Model:	Accustic Arts Player IV
Product category:	CD player / DAC
Price:	€ 19,800.00
Guarantee:	3 years
Versions:	Silver, Black
Distribution::	Accustic Arts, Lauffen Phone +49 7133 97477-0 www.accusticarts.de

Dimensions (HWD):	165 x 482 x 380 mm
Weight::	23 kg
Inputs (digital):	1 x USB 2.0 (Type B) 2 x S/PDIF electrical-coaxial (Cinch) 1 x S/PDIF optical (Toslink)
Outputs (analogue):	1 x balanced (XLR) 1 x unbalanced (Cinch)
Outputs (digital):	1 x S/PDIF electrical coaxial (Cinch) 1 x S/PDIF optical (Toslink)
Maximum sampling rate/resolution (inputs):	- USB: PCM 384 kHz/32 bit, DSD512 - S/PDIF: PCM 192 kHz/24 bit
Playable media:	CD, CD-R, CD-RW
Input data formats:	- WAV, FLAC, ALAC, AIFF, MP3 etc. - DSD
Total distortion (THD + N):	0.0001 %
Optional upgrade:	- System remote control in high-quality aluminium version (€ 590.00)

Score	
Overall score:	100+
Class:	Luxury class
Price/performance:	reasonable

place atop everything. This is the heavyweight cover of the CD slot, because the Player IV is a top loader that doesn't require a drawer – keeping it free from all associated mechanical and seismic problems.

Audiophile premium drive

The cover plate is adorned with a chrome plaque, in the centre of which is the insignia of Accustic Arts – frosted and raised. This perfectly continues the design of the front and once again enhances the wow effect felt by anyone who beholds the Player IV. Pushing the massive cover backwards reveals the embedded drive. The CD Pro-8 is a superb successor to the excellent Philips CD Pro2. It comes from the Viennese company StreamUnlimited, which emerged from a former Philips development centre. Designed for audio applications, this drive is integrated into a metal die-cast chassis. This guarantees high robustness as well as resonance resistance. The drive mounting itself follows the subchassis principle, which is also used for mechanical decoupling in turntable drives. This toploader drive plays CD, CD-R and CD-RW as media. To ensure that the data disc has a secure hold and rotates stably in favour of the best possible scanning, the silver piece is weighted on the top with a chrome-plated, weighty and magnetically adhering metal puck.



Sliding the cover back gives you access to the drive of the top loader: Designed exclusively for audio applications, the CD Pro 8 module is recognisable by its metal surround and characteristic carbon fibre mesh.

Haptic feast with exclusive service

Die Bedienung gelingt nun ohne die üblichen tausend Operation now succeeds without the usual thousand buttons and switches. Instead, the Player IV also offers the neatness so typical of Accustic Arts – featuring two large, chrome-plated metal buttons exclusively. These control knobs also excel in their handling: The smooth gait and the palpable gentle latching are a haptic feast. With the right button you select the CD function by turning – let's say – start, pause, stop or track jump forward and backward. Small blue LEDs indicate the currently achieved function, which is then activated by pressing the button. With the track jump options, a long press also allows fast forward and backward navigation within the track. Alternatively, all CD functions can also be handled via the supplied remote control. The simple plastic command transmitter also allows direct track selection via the number



The right control button is reserved for CD handling. Like its counterpart on the left, turning this metal, chrome-finished wheel is a haptic poem.

keys. Using the "Time" button, we can also find out the elapsed track duration and the remaining playing time of the track or the entire CD. None of the other buttons on the remote control have any function.

Sound centre for HiRes Files

A narrow and mirrored display informs us about all the happenings during CD operation. It's placed on the front under a noble shiny plaque. The single-line display is really easy to read with blue LED segments – indicating the first track number and total playing time, then during playback track number and played track time as well as other current activities of the player. Now to the right control button on the device front: You can switch the device on or put it into standby mode by long pressing. The Player VI, on the other hand, is switched off completely via a rear toggle switch. But actually the right chrome button is a source selector switch. Besides its function as a CD player, the Player IV is also the sound centre for recorded files from laptop, computer or other digital source devices. It offers four interfaces for this purpose. Three of these are S/PDIF inputs – one of which is optically designed and two are implemented electrically coaxially. They accept PCM files up to 192 kilohertz/24 bit – the maximum according to the S/PDIF specifications.

Multi-master: Use also as exclusively DAC or pure CD transport

The fourth digital channel is a USB-B port – and here the new Player IV scores with higher HiRes: Thanks to fresh DAC, it now supports PCM files up to 384 kilohertz/32 bit and DSD files up to DSD512. The DSD data is inserted into a PCM container according to the DoP (DSD over PCM) method, which simplifies the internal data transport. Only during the specific conversion process from digital to analog are they recognised as DSD files and treated accordingly. With the new converter module, the Player IV is all the more explicitly recommended for use as a pure DAC. Thankfully, it then makes its converter available both via a balanced and an asymmetrical output. Alternatively, the Player IV can also be used as a pure CD transport. This is useful if you already have an



The tidy front offers the subtle display in the centre under the plaque with the company logo. It provides information about the current activity of the player with its blue LED segment displays or provides information about the CD – such as the currently running track and elapsed track playing time.

external top DAC or if you want to edit the music on your computer. For this purpose, the digital data can then be tapped at a coaxial-electric as well as an optical S/PDIF output.

Upsampling accuracy

Even with a new DAC module, Player IV retains a traditional virtue: The data read from CD in the format 44.1 kilohertz/16 bit undergoes upsampling to 384 kilohertz/32 bit. The sound can benefit from this increase in sampling rate and bit depth. The conversion facilitates a more accurate interpolation and thus a correct reconstruction of the analog signal by adding calculated intermediate values. What's more, upsampling minimises jitter. These are errors that occur due to fluctuations in the clock frequency. As a result, data is not evaluated at the right time – but instead too early or too late. The higher accuracy of the data processing thus allows a more faithful restoration of the original analog signal and thus a better sound. The subsequent music signal output via a balanced output is consistent: The balanced signal transmission with original and inverted signal is the professional standard for good reason – because the double signal transmission can eliminate all interference acting on the signal via the cable path.

Elaborate circuitry for pure sound

The new top converter and proven premium CD drive are certainly the heart of the Player IV. But their qualities can only be demonstrated by perfect embedding in the entire circuit electronics. Here, too, Accoustic Arts goes to enormous lengths. This begins with the amply dimensioned power supply: It operates with two 25 volt toroidal transformers. A powerful and reserve-rich feed ultimately promotes sonic purity and tranquility, because the entire electronics can always operate in their comfort zone and there are never any bottlenecks in the energy supply. This supply is now done separately for the laser control, the display control, the digital signal processing and the D/A converter section to avoid any mutual influence. For the same reason, the analog and digital sections in the



The Player IV proves to be a multi-master with its diverse connection options: The input section offers two electrical coaxial and one optical S/PDIF input as well as a USB port. The output department digitally offers two S/PDIF interfaces, so that the Player IV can also be used as a pure CD transport. On the analog side, the player scores with a balanced and an unbalanced output. In combination with the digital inputs, the player can thus also be used as a pure DAC.

D/A converter stage are also spatially separated. As a result, the greatest possible interference voltage distance is achieved. Overall, the nonlinear distortions including noise could be reduced by a factor of ten with the Player IV – to a ludicrously low 0.0001 percent.

The Accoustic Arts Player IV in practice

Let's finally take the Player IV into the auditorium and let it play. We start with its core competence, CD playback. Inserting the data disc is an experience in itself: sliding the heavy aluminium cover plate backwards along the guide rails, placing the CD on the turntable, weighing down the silver piece with the puck, pulling the cover forwards to close the slot, and finally putting the drive into motion – this almost ritual beginning is somewhat reminiscent of putting on a vinyl disc. We chose the "Fantasia Suite" from the live album classic "Friday Night in San Francisco" for the launch. Guitarists John McLaughlin, Al di Meola and Paco de Lucia excel here and send the audience into ecstasy with their virtuosity. This CD is famous for the intensity of the stage performance and the audible enthusiasm of the audience – and the Player IV also lets us experience all this.



The left-hand chrome-plated control knob is used for source selection. Because the converter of the Player IV can also be used for playing external files, four digital players can be connected in addition to CD playback. Pressing this button for a long time switches on the Player IV and puts it into standby mode.



The CD is placed on the small turntable of the drive and weighed down with a metal, also chrome-plated puck that adheres magnetically. It securely fixes the CD and promotes smooth running with its mass - while minimising wobble movements. All this makes it easier for the reading unit to scan the CD. This is the prerequisite for reading out the information as error-free as possible.

In the middle of the theatre as part of the audience

At the beginning, we're transferred to the Warfield Theatre in San Francisco by the incredibly intense live atmosphere: With wonderful accuracy, the Player IV makes us part of the enthusiastic audience. Fans cheer on the musicians on stage with frenetic applause, where even clapping by individual pairs of hands can be heard - sometimes with shouts of "McLaughlin". The Player IV manages to display the finest spatial information in addition to the audience here. So we sit with our eyes closed in the middle of this magnificent former variety theatre - even before the three guitar giants get going on stage. With an alternative CD player connected for comparison, this three-dimensionality is much less impressive: The whole thing seems more distant, the theatre smaller. The Player IV is therefore able to reproduce more spaciouly, more openly and in greater detail - and thus more intensively. This also applies to the stage on which the three string magicians now enchant the audience and thus also us.

Audio string selection

With the Player IV we also sit noticeably closer to the stage with the three guitar grandmasters: Their string strokes are clearer, more dynamic and more directly perceptible. So now we hear the differences more clearly: the right-seated Al di Meola, like the centrally positioned John McLaughlin, plays a guitar with steel strings, both striking with picks. That's why their tone is tougher. Paco de Lucia, on the other hand, plays a flamenco guitar strung with nylon strings, which he also plucks with his bare fingers. So his tone is softer. Even these wonderfully audible contrasts of stringing and playing styles make the different guitars seem more contemporary. We almost see the three musicians working on the steel and nylon of their instruments - especially since all the playing noises that make the playback authentic are also audible: The tearing of the strings with plastic picks and fingernails, the snarling of the neck cuff sticks, the finger motions gliding over the strings lend a like-real feeling.



The Player IV comes with the simple plastic remote shown on the right. At an additional cost, Accoustic Arts delivers the left-hand, elegant system remote control, which, like the player, is realised in brushed aluminium and sparkling chrome.

Impressive presentation power with full colour richness

Just as the instruments are different, so too are the playing styles different: the world-music-savvy John McLaughlin shines with his fast alternate picking phrases, the more technically acting jazz rocker Al di Meola amazes with his furious fingerboard crossings - and Paco de Lucia counters the two fusion guitarists grandiosely with Andalusian high-speed flamenco. These stylistic differences can also be experienced more impressively with the Player IV. This also succeeds so outstandingly because its reproduction is extremely harmonious, appears analog and offers a greater richness of timbre. Even unusual ideas by the guitarists have a great effect - such as the tremolo passage, in which McLaughlin plays furiously fast notes on the high e-string, moving up the guitar neck with his grasping hand index finger until he finally reaches a high note that barely has any sound, but rather seems percussive - and now McLaughlin effectively lowers his striking speed. The same tense part sounds rather anaemic, pale - and therefore quite underwhelming - with the other CD player.

Fresh boost via balanced output

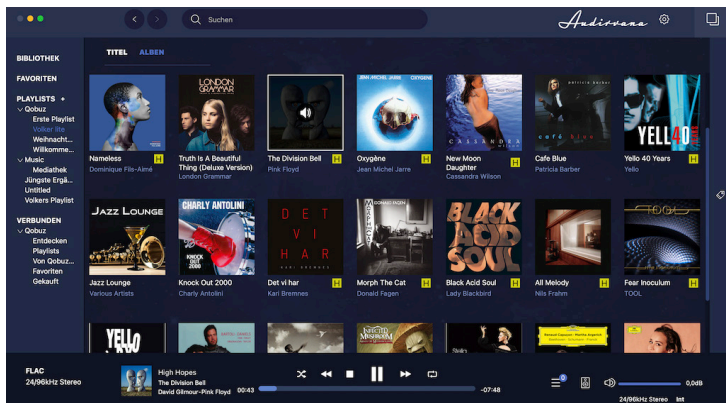
The performance of the Player IV can be enhanced. So far, we've operated it via the unbalanced output. Now we use the symmetrical output - and experience a real boost of freshness: Even after matching the levels - the balanced signal is louder because of the sum of the two signal parts - the playback is once again clearer, crisper and the resolution even better. The spatial impressions are therefore stronger - the three-dimensional representation succeeding all the more intensively. Of course, this also applies to the musical happenings on stage: The guitars sound more powerful and present, we experience the sometimes hard, strong string strokes with greater dynamics. Tonally, too, the playback increases into the bass range - thereby making the low e-strings, which are struck empty, all the more brilliant. McLaughlin, di Meola and de Lucia apparently have even more fun making mu-



The intersections of the digital section: The USB port of the Player IV allows streaming HiRes files up to PCM 384 kilohertz/32 bit and DSD512. PCM goes 192 kilohertz/24 bit via the S/PDIF inputs - i.e. the maximum possible with this type of interface.



The analog output section is compatible with all subsequent amplifiers thanks to the balanced XLR jacks and the unbalanced RCA jacks. If the amp allows it, you should choose the balanced output: Due to interference immunity, this type of signal routing is preferable - and the Player IV delivers its optimum performance via this output.



An audiophile, HiRes-enabled player software such as Audirvana should be used for playback via USB. This enables HiRes streaming of your own hard disk files or use of the opulent offerings from an integrated music service such as Qobuz.

sic now, their interaction sounds fresher, more vital - and so the virtuoso string witchcraft of the three seems all the more furious.

Sound culture in orchestral large format

We also experience this freshness gain with other pieces of music - and also with tracks that we don't play via CD. The Player IV can also be used as an independent standalone DAC beyond its drive operation. Now we connect our laptop to its USB port. The audiophile player software Audirvana is installed on it. This allows us to play files from our hard drive as well as from the integrated music service Qobuz. We stream from Beethoven the opening Allegro of the Sixth Symphony in a recording with the Bremen Chamber Philharmonic conducted by Paavo Järvi. This edition is also extremely successful in terms of recording technology - and that's why the Player IV can also unfold its sound culture in an orchestral large format: The sound body is wonderfully present, the violins, violas, cellos and double basses, the woodwinds and brass as well as the percussionists are perfectly fanned out and staggered in front of us. We can even hear individual musicians from the group - making question and answer games of the various instruments all the more appealing.

Peace and purity

Again we notice the immense purity of the reproduction: Even the very delicate and quiet passages, which the orchestra makes with great fine dynamics, are perfectly clear down to the smallest detail - allowing the utmost musical enjoyment. The wonderful tranquility with which the Player IV performs its conversion also contributes to this. This goes hand in hand with an absolute coherence and harmony: The interplay of the excellent Bremen Kammerphilharmonie sounds completely calm and self-evident in the reproduction - as if things couldn't be otherwise. So we experience the "pleasant, serene sensations" with which Beethoven headlined this first movement of his Pastorals with wonderful relaxation: the Player IV delivers these sensations to us freely at home. At the end of this Allegro we sit comfortable and relaxed on the couch - in a sublime mood. Here, the power of music - and the sonic culture of an excellent playback chain, at the beginning of which is the Player IV - is once again evident.

Conclusion

The Accoustic Arts Player IV presents itself as a noble and excellent conversion artist: The top loader excels in CD operation with an audiophile precision drive and accurate upsampling technology. With its fresh premium DAC and four digital interfaces, it also enables HiRes streaming up to PCM 384 kHz/32 bit and DSD512. In this way, the Player IV reconciles tradition and modernity - and scores here and there with a wonderfully pure, clear and precise reproduction. It has an immense calmness and harmony and offers a highly harmonious, analog soundscape. The outstanding resolution ensures a high level of detail and phenomenal audibility. Combined with the superb dynamics, this leads to a supreme - vividly present - image with vital freshness and an outstanding spatiality with excellent depth staggering. This is how the Player IV continues what we've already experienced with other Accoustic Arts components: It conveys a sound that's noble and pure in all facets - allowing audiophiles to embark on a sublime journey towards musical perfection.

Test & Text: Volker Frech
Photos: Branislav Čakić

