

Mini Melcos

Jon Myles is seduced by Melco's latest half-width storage unit and its optical disc reader.

Music comes in many different forms these days. There's digital downloads, CD rips, digitised copies of vinyl collections and music held on USB sticks (of which I invariably lose, misplace or simply forget what's on them). Therefore the problem of where to store all this is becoming more and more important. And it's not just storing them in one place but storing them in the best quality possible.

There's always the ubiquitous NAS (network attached storage) drive where everything can be rounded up to be relayed to your hi-fi system via a streamer. Convenient

as this is the majority of NAS drives are not pure hi-fi components, being purposed to hold many other types of media such as films, movies, office files etc. As a result they can be rather noisy environments not conducive to the replay of delicate music signals.

So enter Melco - whose goal was to produce high-quality storage devices specifically designed to store and replay music to your system via a network player/streamer/DAC. I reviewed the original entry-level N1A model four years ago (Hi-Fi World March 2015 issue) and was impressed by its detail, resolution and flexibility.

Since then Melco have updated and revised its product line and has

now come up with two of its most intriguing models yet - at a price point that may well draw in a host of new customers.

First of all the new Melco N100. It's a half-width (215mm) shoe-box sized unit but contains all the usual Melco elements. The chassis has an aluminium front and back panel with the rest constructed from 2mm steel to protect against vibration.

Inside is a 2TB hard disk drive with its own anti-vibration system while there are three USB 2.0 ports - compatible with a USB-DAC, USB CD drive and USB storage such as USB HDD or USB flash memory.

The N100 is DLNA/UPnP compliant with a gigabit dual ethernet





The N100 storage drive rear panel has USB ports for data upload/HDD and two RJ45 ethernet sockets for network connection.

LAN port for connection to a local network. Do note, though, there is no wireless connection.

The front features a large OLED display for displaying track titles, status, sample rate and other information. To its right sits a button for scrolling through all the information. To be honest these can take a little getting used to - but fortunately Melco has now launched its own app for mobile devices and tablets that makes things much easier as it contains all the usual functions such as track search, playlist creation and management as well as full Tidal and Qobuz integration.

To sit alongside the N100 is the similar-sized D100 - a CD disc ripper or stand alone player when

connected to a USB-DAC. Again it's constructed from heavy duty steel and feels weighty at 3.5 kg. The cynics out there will undoubtedly point out that ripping a CD is simply replicating 1s and 0s — something even a MacBook Air can do at an adequate quality. I'd advise them to read on.

SOUND QUALITY

The thing that has always impressed me about Melco's products is their pristine sound. They have an ability to draw out details that some of the best streaming products fail to discern.

Take the beginning of John Coltrane's 'One Down, One Up: Live At The Half Note' where there



D100 rear panel. At left is a USB 3.0 Type-A port for connecting another USB Device. The USB 3.0 Type-B port on the right is for connecting a Digital Music Library or computer.



The D100 spins CDs and rips them to the N100.

is some faint audience chatter in the background. So faint, in fact, that the effect is often lost through a NAS drive.

Not with the Melco. Yes, it's still in the background but adds just the right atmosphere to bring out some extra ambience to the track.

And when Coltrane's saxophone kicks in it sounds crisp, refined and entirely natural — his notes flowing with an unerring



Internally, the N100 is a hugely complex network attached storage drive.

naturalness.

Steely Dan's 'Aja' had the same quality — there was weight, yes, but a sense that every instrument was occupying its own space so every musical line could be made out.

In fact this is one of the most impressive qualities of the N100. It is free of digital harshness with a lightness of touch and accuracy that makes brings a realism to anything you play. I hooked it up to a number of USB-DACs and the effect was always the same.

What came as a real revelation, though, was ripping CDs through the D100 and then transferring them to the N100 via USB.

The air and space that this opened up in even familiar recordings was palpable. I was struck by just how much more vibrant Charlie Mingus's bass sounded on 'Mingus Ah Um'. I could hear the pluck of every string with a force that ordinary CD rips do not bring across.

Jimi Hendrix's guitar on 'Hey Joe' also had extra bite. It would, of course, be wrong to say the D100 was adding anything — but it was certainly eliminating the haziness that some other rippers can add.

CONCLUSION

Melco has produced two complementary products here that are ideal for anyone wanting to store their music in one place. Easy to use, superbly built but most of all imbued with wonderful sound.

MELCO N100 £1800



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

Great sounding, large capacity network storage device that is hard to beat at the price.

FOR

- large capacity
- sound quality
- build

AGAINST

- needs USB-DAC

MELCO D100 £999



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

One of the best optical disc readers available. Ideal for ripping CDs or as a standalone player.

FOR

- accurate rips
- ease-of-use
- quality construction

AGAINST

- no DAC

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