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hi-fi

and home theatre technology

EPOS EPIC 5

A baffling solution?

HI-RES HI-FI

Multi-purpose portable



REVIEWED

Colorfly C4 Portable
Player, DAC and SRC

Epos Epic 5
What can we say? Wow!

Meridian 808.3 CDP
Personally signed by Bob Stuart

Mystère CA21/PA21
Valves rule... OK?

Castle Anniversary
Small speakers for large castles

Triton Audio NeoLev
Levitation dampers demystified

AUSTRALIAN AUDIO & AV SHOW 2011

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Colorfly Pocket Hi-Fi C4 Pro Player

PORTABLE PLAYER



Unpacking Colorfly's 'Pocket' HiFi Player, I felt as if I'd been transported back to the 1950s and was holding a prop in a 'futuristic' science fiction movie. What else could I say about a device that has what appears to be a burnished brass faceplate inset into a real wooden case... not to mention the old-fashioned volume slider control and curved rocker switch. How was I to reconcile the appearance of the Colorfly C4 Pro with what Steve Lees, of Wicked Digital, had said he was sending me to review, which was, in his exact words: 'A fairly unique piece of gear that just received a spectacular review in the UK's *Hi-Fi Choice Magazine*, and should be of great interest to the readers.'

THE EQUIPMENT

So what is the Colorfly Pocket HiFi C4 Pro Player? First, let's put its size into perspective, because it won't be readily apparent from the photograph. The Colorfly is around the same width and depth as a pack of cigarettes and just a few centimetres taller (78x25x127mm). What it is is a portable, battery-powered music player that's capable of storing and playing hi-res audio files (up to 24-bit/192kHz) that can also function as an external DAC, a headphone amplifier and even as a digital sample rate converter.

Players that can replay hi-res audio files are a great idea, but such files take a lot of memory (an hour's worth of 24/96 FLAC occupies around 1GB of memory). The Colorfly C4 Pro comes with 32GB of on-board memory, which can be expanded by plugging a MicroSD card into a slot on the bottom 'edge'

of the player. Hi-res file formats that can be played are WAV, APE and FLAC. It will also play lo-res (MP3) files (up to 320kbps). If you aren't familiar with APE, it's a lossless music

file compression format that's been around for around ten years, but has failed to gain the foothold that's been grabbed by FLAC. Developed by Matt Ashland, of Monkey's Audio, APE is like FLAC, in that it makes perfect, bit-for-bit copies of your music. However, unlike FLAC, you can automatically 'decompress' APE files back to their original formats, which is 'way cool. This means that even if you use hi-res files exclusively you'll still be able to fit around 32 hours of music onto the C4... and that's before you expand its memory via a MicroSD card (up to 32GB).

As you can see on the photograph, the top panel of the Colorfly has four controls: the slider (volume) control mentioned earlier, a two-way rocker switch that is used to adjust equalisation through several presets (rock, jazz, etc) and to initiate sample rate conversion (SRC). The other control is actually a 'thumbwheel' control, except that it's not presented in a conventional 'thumbwheel' format, so there are 'North' and 'South' and 'East' and 'West' functions, plus a central 'OK' pushbutton, but they're all offset. There are also additional functions at NNW (Menu) and SSE (Return). Above these controls is a 49x33mm (display area) colour display which is superbly crisp and sharp with spectacularly bright and saturated colours, but a bit wasted because the file structure is almost DOS-like and lacks graphics.

The chip-sets inside are sourced from Cirrus Logic, with the all-important DAC being the CS4398. When he launched this DAC in 2003, Cirrus' Jason Rhode said: 'The CS4398 is ideally designed for high-end audio systems.'

The casing of Colorfly's Pocket Hi-Fi C4 player is made of North American black walnut. Although it's machined using a CNC router, the edges are rounded by hand.

IN USE

I used the Colorfly C4 both as a portable player, with headphones, and as a DAC in a hi-fi system, decoding the output from a CD player. It excelled in both applications. Although I found it pretty bulky and a tad heavy for more active use (such as jogging), it was fine when I was walking, or on public transport. The battery seemed good for around 5-6 hours, but I was doing a lot of fiddling with the various controls in order to write this review, which meant I was using the display quite a lot more than you will in ordinary day-to-day use, so I'd imagine you could expect a little more playback time than I achieved and, anyway, charging is simply a matter of plugging the Colorfly into any USB port or charger.

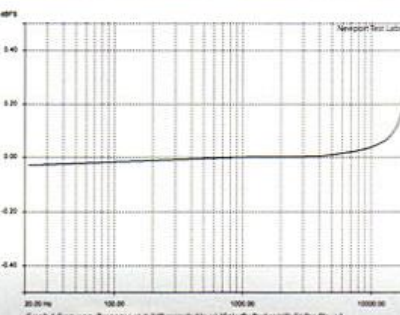
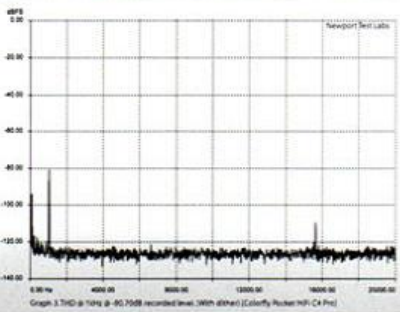
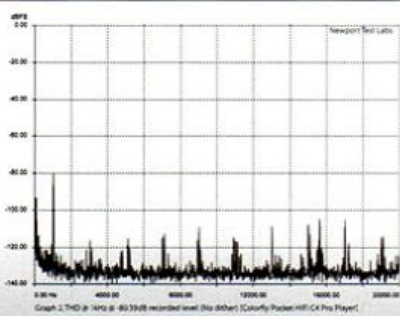
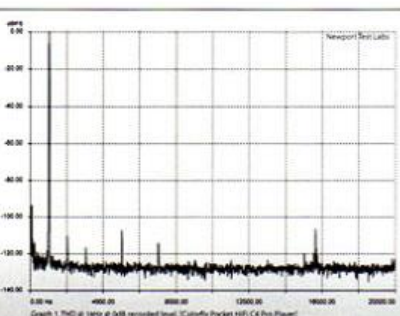
Used in its DAC mode, I found the sound of decoded files (I used only 16-bit/44.1kHz and 24-bit/96kHz) was astoundingly good. There was absolutely no noise at all that I could hear (helped along, no doubt by the fact that the C4 is not only battery-powered, but also uses solid-state memory) and the music was gloriously detailed and perfectly balanced right across the audio spectrum. While its price makes it inevitable it will be compared with products from Apple (Touch models particularly) or Cowan Audio, both of which sell similarly-technically-specified models for considerably less than the C4 (though they cannot match the Colorfly's input/output options nor its solid build quality), I was more concerned that despite the price premium, the C4 could not *record* music, via either a microphone or a line input, because having either of these features would have been a sale-clincher for me.

Although I was unimpressed by the paucity of track-related information that can be shown in the display, I was very impressed by the 'feel' and accuracy of the old-fashioned slider volume control, and it turns out it is rather a special slider. Made by famous Japanese manufacturer ALPS, it's that company's top-line model, from its so-called 'pro-audio

series', but with additional dust protection and grounding connections specified by Colorful, which makes the Colorfly.

CONCLUSION

While I am convinced the Colorfly C4 will find a welcome—and well-deserved—home in the pockets of many well-heeled audiophiles, not least because of its ability to double-up as a DAC and/or headphone amplifier for home- and office-based applications, I suspect that it may become most popular with audio professionals as an essential 'tool-of-trade' that can be a completely portable source of not only hi-res music, but also of accurate, low-distortion test signals, and can also be used a back-up device in case they have an urgent in-the-field requirement to replace a failed DAC or sample-rate converter. *—greg borrowman*



Colorfly Pocket Hi-Fi C4 Pro Player - Laboratory Test Results

Analogue Section	Result	Units/Comment
Output Voltage	1.7319	volts
Frequency Response	See Graph	dB (20Hz - 20kHz)
Channel Separation	107 / 86 / 56	dB at 16Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz
THD+N	0.023%	@ 1kHz @ 0dBFS
Channel Balance	0.54dB	@ 1kHz @ 0dBFS
Channel Phase	0.23 / 0.04 / 0.23	degrees at 16Hz / 1kHz / 20kHz
Group Delay	+98.2 / -0.3	degrees (1-20kHz / 20-1kHz)
Signal-to-Noise Ratio (No Pre-emph)	68 / 81	dB (unweighted/weighted)
De-Emphasis Error	0.008 / 0.034 / 0.106	at 1kHz / 4kHz / 16kHz
Linearity Error @ -60.00dB / -70.00dB	0.08 / 0.07	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -80.59dB / -85.24dB	0.08 / 0.07	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -89.46dB / -91.24dB	0.22 / 0.13	dB (Test Signal Not Dithered)
Linearity Error @ -80.70dB / -90.31dB	0.05 / 0.05	dB (Test Signal Dithered)
Digital Section	Result	Units/Comment
Out of Band Spurious Components	-105.406dB	
Suppression of Imaging Components	-102.421dB	(Worst Case)
Level Dependent Logarithmic Gain	14.529dB	
Intermodulation Distortion (1)	-100.581dB	18kHz/20kHz 1:1 Ratio
Intermodulation Distortion (2)	-84.2430dB	41Hz/7993Hz 4:1 Ratio
Low Level Noise Modulation	+1.687dB	Worst Case
Idle Channel Noise	-109.791dB	CCIR-RMS weighting
Signal-to-Noise Ratio	-110.061dB	CCIR-RMS weighting
Non-Linear Interchannel Crosstalk (a)	-104.408dB	3kHz (2nd-order ref 17kHz/20kHz)
Non-Linear Interchannel Crosstalk (b)	-107.866dB	6kHz (3rd-order ref 17kHz/20kHz)
Non-Linear Interchannel Crosstalk (c)	-97.799dB	10.040kHz (2nd re 40Hz/10kHz)
Non-Linear Interchannel Crosstalk (d)	-108.151dB	10.080kHz (3rd re 40Hz/10kHz)
Absolute Phase	Normal (Non-Inverting)	Normal/Inverted

LABORATORY TEST RESULTS

The frequency response of the Colorfly C4 was very flat, as you can see from Graph 4, which shows the response with the C4's switchable output filter in the 'fast decay' mode. In the 'slow' mode, (not graphed) the response rolls off slowly above 10kHz to be 0.8dB down at 20kHz. I was pleasantly surprised to find a properly-adjusted de-emphasis filter is fitted. Channel separation was good but not overly impressive, falling from a best of 107dB at 16Hz to just 56dB at 20kHz. Channel balance was 0.54dB, which is not up to the expectation I'd have for a full-sized DAC, but small enough to be swamped by errors in headphone/loudspeaker pair-matching. Channel phase veered a little awry at the frequency extremes, but was overall good, while group delay was typical for this Cirrus DAC and somewhat smaller than exhibited by some other popular DACs. Absolute phase was normal (non-inverting) which is good design. The signal-to-noise ratio was adequate without being exceptional, with the differences between the digital and analogue sections showing the limiting factor is in the C4's analogue circuitry. The distortion graphs reveal excellent performance, even with an undithered test signal. This performance is graphed in Graph 2, and you can see that all the distortion components are more than 100dB down, despite the low level of the test signal (-80.59dB). The dithered version of this (at -80.79dB) is shown in Graph 3.

Output voltage was also impressively high, with the 1.7-volts measured being easily sufficient to drive any headphones as loud as you could reasonably expect them to go. *—Steve Holding*

Steve Holding

COLORFLY Pocket HiFi C4 Pro Player

Brand: Colorfly
Model: Pocket HiFi C4 Pro
Category: Portable Player
RRP: \$949
Warranty: One Year
Distributor: Wicked Digital Pty Ltd
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 Neutral Bay, NSW 2089
 ☎ **1300 652 802**
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