iFi Audio Zen Blue

Ed Selley makes his Bluetooth life easier with a small but potent system add-on

THERE'S A GOOD chance that Bluetooth is fitted in some form or another to your existing equipment, but with several different versions of enhanced Bluetooth in addition to the standard SBC, it can be a bit of a lottery that your phone or tablet will work as well as it could with connected gear. iFi Audio's Zen Blue intends to get around this by matching a Qualcomm front-end, able to handle pretty much every type of Bluetooth, with an ESS Sabre DAC to decode it. What do I mean by 'pretty much?' AAC, aptX, aptX HD, LDAC and HVA – so everything bar the latest aptX Low Latency standard.

This comes wrapped in a small, well made metal chassis with a pairing button, a sample rate indicator and a glowing logo that shows the version of Bluetooth currently running. Around the back are phono analogue outputs and optical/coaxial digital connections – a

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switch lets you choose between the two. You might want to remain in the digital domain if you already have a DAC in your setup.

It will need to be a good one, though, because the performance of the Zen Blue's internal DAC is very impressive. Revisiting the unbridled lunacy of S*turgill Simpson Presents Sound & Fury* on Netflix, running from an Essential PH-1 phone via LDAC Bluetooth, the

Status lights denote sampling rate and codec

performance of the Zen Blue isn't just 'good for Bluetooth', it's genuinely brilliant. The temple attack sequence is disgorged with real depth, space and detail to it. Switched to digital delivery, and connected via coaxial to a Chord Electronics Hugo2, it manages to be even better; the experience is close to listening to the album itself, rather than via a streaming service.

Throw in a stable connection that seems unfazed by use out to a few metres and you have an absolutely stellar piece of equipment. A must for any Bluetooth user ∎

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

iFi Audio Zen Blue
➜ £130 ➜ ifi-audio.com