



Fernando - 8 min read

# Gato Audio DIA-400S

**Integrated amplifier with cutting-edge technology and striking design.**



Many times in life, one must choose between a series of attributes when deciding on the purchase of a good. It doesn't matter if it's a car, a sofa, or in this case, an amplifier. Who hasn't heard that saying: good, pretty, or cheap, pick 2? In this case, we have an amplifier with a spectacular design, a wide variety of features, plenty of power, and above all, a fairly competitive price, especially considering the aforementioned. Who wouldn't like this?

Without further ado and from Denmark, the prestigious brand Gato Audio has provided us with their DIA-400S amplifier for auditioning. Let's see if they meet the expectations which, I must say, in this particular case, are high.

And I'm not just referring to the design, because this integrated amplifier is not just a "pretty face", the DIA-400S integrates many functions that make it truly a very versatile amplifier. Without exaggeration, all you need to add is a pair of quality speakers, with their respective cables, and you're ready to enjoy high-fidelity music. But, let's not get ahead of ourselves and go into the details.

## **Construction.**

I won't lie. From the first time I saw the photographs of Gato Audio's products, I found them very attractive. A modern and bold design but, above all, elegant. The contrasts between the straight edges and the curves, the finishes, materials, and dimensions. Everything seemed fantastic to me. Even so, I wasn't prepared to see it live. When I received the shipment and opened the box, after removing the protective cover, I literally was left speechless. If you think they look beautiful in photos, wait until you see one live.

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My sample of the DIA-400S came with the Walnut wood finish. Although it doesn't "match" the house decor (as my wife pointed out), I must say that the WAF (Wife Acceptance Factor) has been 100%, another point in favor of the Gato. But let's go with the description.

It's an integrated amplifier. Based on a metallic chassis with rounded edges and a flattened shape. The top is covered with a plate that can be ordered in various finishes, and upon request, they can be painted any imaginable color.

On the front, 2 LED screens stand out along with the central rotary knob, which controls the volume. Below the screens, there are 2 buttons to turn on the equipment and change the input.



The display is of a good size, simple and discreet but, at the same time, striking. It's an interesting solution and, in my opinion, it's very well integrated. It constantly indicates information about the listening volume

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level and the selected source. It can be turned off if desired.

The volume knob has an excellent machined finish, just like the rest of the equipment. A smooth feel and delicate and pleasant operation. The quality is remarkable regarding the construction of the equipment. The sides are rounded and formed through machining into heat sinks although, in class D amplification, this is not a problem.

The rear panel is responsible for organizing all the connections which, in this case, are quite a few. We have RCA (2) and XLR (1) inputs, digital connections in the form of USB, Toslink, and Coaxial. 1 RCA and XLR line output. We also find the power connection, the antenna for Bluetooth, and a couple of switches (BT synchronization and brightness dimmer for the displays). The speaker connection posts are of high quality, metallic, and support various types of connections, including bananas.



The DIA-400S comes with a remote control. It has a metallic body, CNC machined, and has several buttons to directly select the source and control the volume. Its feel and use are very pleasant. The simplicity of its design and operation is a plus.



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Overall, the appearance and feel of the equipment convey quality and solidity. Outstanding machining, materials, and finishes stand out. For an amplifier with so much functionality, its operation is actually quite simple. Just connect everything, turn it on, select the source, and adjust the volume. Simple. In fact, many users may only need to connect the power cable and the speaker cable, as the Bluetooth option is very easy to use and quite useful.

There is another version of the DIA-400S, the NPM, which incorporates network connectivity and is Room Ready, the cost increases slightly, but it is positive to know that this option is available. Thinking of this amplifier already with the integrated streaming option makes it even more attractive.

Returning to wireless connectivity, the operation of Bluetooth is simple. The amplifier quickly connects to any source and maintains a solid and stable connection. I had no problems using this function at any time.

I miss a connection for Phono, especially with the resurgence enjoyed by vinyl in recent years. Even so, it is easy to acquire one and connect it through any of the inputs. Furthermore, Gato Audio offers an excellent option with its Phono preamp, the PPA-1.

### How it sounds.

There is an important detail to address, and that is that, in addition to a beautiful appearance, the DIA-400S has quite a bit of muscle under those rounded silhouettes. It is a class D amplifier, so it is quite efficient. The Gato, in this regard, seems more like a tiger, providing power of up to 400W at 8 Ohms per channel, which is quite remarkable, let's think about doubling the power to 800W if we require speakers with an impedance of 4 Ohms. Need more?



Given the above, the Gato Audio went straight to the large room of the house, where it put the Pylon Opal Monitor speakers to work, then helped to dust off the KEF Q350s and, finally, provided power to enjoy some Amphon Argon 3S.

To take advantage of the Gato Audio's virtues, I made a small playlist for music listening with which I am intimately familiar. Then I listened to the same songs with the different speakers I had available and took

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notes. The playback chain went directly through the Gato audio connected via USB to the computer I use for streaming. The source was Plex with FLAC files.



**Lookin' out my back door - Creedence Clearwater (Cosmo's Factory).** John Fogerty's voice presence quickly spread throughout the entire room. The bass line and drums flooded the room (with marked improvement through the Amphion), an excellent control of the brightest details, and a fairly wide stage. The amplifier's response to transient sounds and the decay of notes in the instruments maintained a tone and naturalness almost present. I left the next song **Run Through the Jungle**. The beginning gave me goosebumps. A very natural sound with a tendency to be cold, mind you, not 100% analytical, but I didn't notice, as I could say about the Aesthetix Mimas, for example, that touch of warmth provided by valves or a class A electronics from yesteryear.

The next song was **Roundabout - Yes (Keys to Ascension)**. The livelier music yielded good results through the Gato. Again, we enjoyed the width of the stage, marked by excellent instrument and space definition. With excellent frequency handling across the board. The presentation was lively and musical. Again, I noticed that the amplifier's definition seems to have no upper limit. The better information you feed it, the better results it delivers. I then tried music that was "compressed" in terms of dynamic range.

**A Perfect Circle - 3 libras (Mer de noms)**. Excellent music that, unfortunately, suffered from the effects of the Loudness Wars. Still, the presentation was more than acceptable, although the decrease in the sensation of clarity and stage that accompanied the loss of information in the dynamic range was notable. Maynard James Keenan's voice conveyed good presence and texture, while Paz Lechantin's bass provided a solid rhythm background to the song.

Overall, the Gato Audio respected the sound profile of the speakers. It never tried to impose a certain sound or had problems working together with the different models. In all cases, we enjoyed clear, wide, controlled, and pleasant sound. Except for the limitations of bookshelf speakers, there was never a need for power to reach pleasant audio levels in a room of more than 20m<sup>2</sup>. I imagine that this statement will hold true even with almost all the more commercial models of floor-standing speakers. I honestly can't think of a speaker that would require more than 400W for its operation in a family environment.

The ease of use of the DIA-400S, coupled with its Bluetooth connectivity and remote control, quickly made the amplifier the first choice for listening to music during the day, leaving aside even my main system, which resides in a smaller room. Well, a well-deserved rest for the McIntosh, which usually work

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tirelessly.

Regarding Bluetooth connectivity, I must say that, thanks to the aptX protocol, the music sounded very good through the Gato Audio. It was easy to forget that it was a Bluetooth transmission and not a source in digital (CD) or analog (Vinyl) format, as the sound was much closer to a high-resolution stream than what Bluetooth sound has us accustomed to.

As for the internal DAC, when connected via USB, it recognized up to 24bits - 192,000 Hz in 2 channels as the maximum resolution, which equals a PCM format superior to the CD, that is, nothing to scoff at. In fact, this is the maximum resolution offered by Apple Music in the HiRes Lossless format. Believe me, it's enough.

### Technical Data.

Power:	2x400W / 8ohms - 2x800W / 4ohms
Frequency Response:	20 Hz-20kHz - 0.5dB & 2Hz-70kHz - 3dB
Total Harmonic Distortion:	<0.01% at maximum power
Signal to Noise Ratio:	110 dB
Maximum Line Output Level:	13V Balanced, 6.5V Unbalanced
Total Harmonic Distortion:	< 0.001% prior to output
Input Impedance:	20 kohms RCA or 40 kohms balanced
Output Line Impedance:	75 ohms
Voltage Gain:	26 dB
Recommended Speaker Load:	4-16 ohms

### Conclusions.

The Gato Audio has been a very pleasant surprise for several reasons. First, as I said at the beginning, the design seemed spectacular to me. Really, in person, it's even more impressive. The customization options are the icing on the cake, being able to coordinate the colors of the embellishments with your car, decor, soccer team, whatever you want.

Its ease of use and plug & play practicality make it intuitive and useful. There's nothing superfluous, and if there's something missing, it's minimal. The absence of the phono preamp is worth mentioning, as I said earlier, but in reality, few users will miss it, or even those who need it and don't have a solution at hand.

On the other hand, the sound we heard through the different speakers that accompanied the DIA-400S was, at all times, powerful, defined, and with excellent clarity and detail. The amplifier had no problems handling any of the different models and, especially, presented favorable attributes in all of them regarding stage width, control and power in bass, tone, and good handling of high frequencies. Without quite having a 100% neutral or analytical sound, the DIA-400S showed detail and some musicality, which allowed for prolonged listening without fatigue. I would describe the equipment's sound profile as high fidelity and lively. I missed listening to it with floor-standing speakers and whose power demand was even greater, although I have no doubts about the Gato's ability to provide them with enough energy, I would like to appreciate how it handles a greater number of drivers and applications with greater capacity for representing low frequencies. Well, I'll put it on my to-do list.

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It's hard to extend conclusions when the equipment so amply meets expectations and presents so few opportunities to find faults, but believe me, that's how it is. The DIA-400S is, as the S indicates, a Super Integrated.

Yes, there will surely be amplifiers with better design (right now I can't think of many, and in any case, it would be quite subjective), with more power (only a few come to mind in this price range, even fewer in such a compact format), with better sound (again, debatable and subjective) but one that is entirely superior to the Gato Audio in all these aspects, doesn't come to mind. In fact, if I wanted to complain about the price ( 3,855.00 at the time of this review, already a very competitive price in the market), I could even propose the following: the DIA-250S, the younger brother of the 400S, whose starting price is 2,745.00 with the difference being that the smaller one offers "only" 250W of power and has a different sound profile.

### **Where to buy.**

The purchase can be made from the Gato Audio website. Upon making the purchase directly, you will receive the equipment at home shortly, perfectly packaged and ready for enjoyment. I'm sure you won't regret it.

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