



iCAN micro SE (Special Edition) UPDATE

By [Dadracer](#)

Posted 1/11/16

Pros: Improved sound at each end of the spectrum Better separation of images

Cons: Need to add another layer to the iRack



Review Details:



Hi there this is by way of an initial impression only as I'm supposed to be putting up our Christmas tree but instead I am listening to music!!! **UPDATE is down in the last paragraphs below.**

Anyhow I got the chance to borrow a new iCAN micro SE from those kind ifi Audio folks to add into my desk top ifi based computer system and to see how it compares with the amp section of my pre existing micro iDSD.

The system now stands at elderly Toshiba laptop to ifi Mercury to iPurifier2 to iUSB power to Gemini cables to micro iDSD to iCAN micro SE to Sennheiser HD700s.

As I understand it the key differences between the iCAN and iCAN SE are upgraded components and refining of the Xbass and 3D controls. I don't have the full specification sheet for the SE but it is my belief it will be effectively the same as that of the iCAN itself which is on the ifi audio web site here <http://ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/micro-ican/>

I have not heard the iCAN so can't comment on any differences but I have compared the iCAN SE and amp section of the iDSD.

Listened to a range of music as follows

Aretha, Chain of fools
James Bay, Chaos & the calm
Dusty, In Memphis
Eagles, Hotel California
Keb Mo', Keb Mo'
Leon Bridges, Coming Home
Lou, Transformer
Rickie Lee Jones, RLJ

but most of all Gregory Porters Liquid Spirit which is just delightful.

Anyhow and most importantly was there a difference? Let me preface this by saying I was a bit biased going into this as I was hoping that the difference would be minimal and I would not need to reach for my credit card (especially at this time of the year when its feeling worn out).

Sadly I hear the difference and it is not tiny but neither is it massive. It feels like there is more top and bottom. Even with the Xbass and 3D set to direct I can hear a more extended bass and a clearer treble. The bass adds some foundation and warmth over the iDSD. Adding in one spot of Xbass is more than enough for me. If you really love bass then the full fat three spot Xbass might suit you and it still doesn't sound flabby but just feels too bass centric for me. The choice is yours but my preference was one spot max.

At the other end it feels like cymbals are more realistic sounding. There is no harshness as far as I can tell or sibilance but just a clarity which is quite compelling. There does not appear to be any affect on the mid band from these extensions in bass and treble.....which is not what you might expect.

Now the 3D was a bit surprising in that the sound stage did not seem to be changed but the individual instruments and vocals were better defined.....does that make sense? I am not sure I can explain it better but I will add more thoughts once I spend more time on it. I could not hear a great deal of difference on the various 3D settings so stuck with direct as the HD700s are not short on imaging themselves, so maybe there would be more variation on other headphones. I will take my other headphones from my main vinyl centric system and try them and see if I can hear a difference.

So that's all right now and I remain conflicted. The addition of the iCAN SE is an improvement in the areas I have mentioned above but adds more gear to my stack and I am currently under embargo ahead of the festive period.

UPDATE NEWS

Ok now that the festive period is over and everyone has gone back to work and/or home I have had the chance to try 2 new things with the iCAN micro SE which I still have on loan from the lovely ifi Audio folks.

The first was a simple swap of headphones from HD700 to HD800, and not only is the ICAN SE able to drive them but it does so very well indeed and opened up another level in terms of sound quality most apparent at each end of the audio spectrum and also very noticeably in terms of sound stage presentation but more to do with the definition of individual performers or instruments.

So that then led to the final challenge of putting the iCAN micro SE up against my main system headphone amplifier the Auralic Taurus mk2. This is also a class A solid state headphone amp but can also be run in balanced mode. It is however approximately 4 times the price of the iCAN and so I was expecting a significant difference.

Well in fact while there is a difference it took me more time than I expected and several swap overs of amps to confirm what I was hearing. The sound balance is very close and if the Auralic was more extended it was only a fractional thing. The biggest differential was in the sound stage. I tried a small number of recordings which I am familiar with and made the comparison several times and even then it was not a vast gulf in performance. To be as fair as possible I was using the Auralic in SE mode to make it more a like for like so the Auralic in balanced mode yields a better still performance.

On a rough scale of performance versus cost I would have to say that the iCAN gets to 85-90% of the overall sound quality of the Auralic (in SE mode) which is far closer than I had expected and maybe its actually closer still but I don't want to admit it given the four times price difference!!!

In any event if you are thinking that the iCAN micro SE is not a serious headphone amplifier as it is too inexpensive then think again.....no really. If on the other hand you are starting out then this is a scorchingly good amp for the money and will make the best of any headphones you are likely to be starting out with.

More later when I am recovered from this shock.....