

## Dela S5 network switch: a high end streaming essential

December 1, 2025  
Chris Bailie



### Dela S5 network switch

It is incredible to think how far network streaming has come in just a few years. When I purchased my first serious streaming DAC some eight years ago, the notion of spending more than double figures on a network switch would have been akin to heresy. Yet here I am, reviewing one costing £7,499, which is still some £5,000 less than Dela's top-of-the-range switch, the S1, reviewed under the Melco brand. I also hosted Dela's S1 as part of a review for another publication, and it is indeed an impressive beast.

For those unaware, Dela is the new name for Melco. The moniker has been used in certain other markets for some time, but the Japanese brand has now decided to adopt it globally.

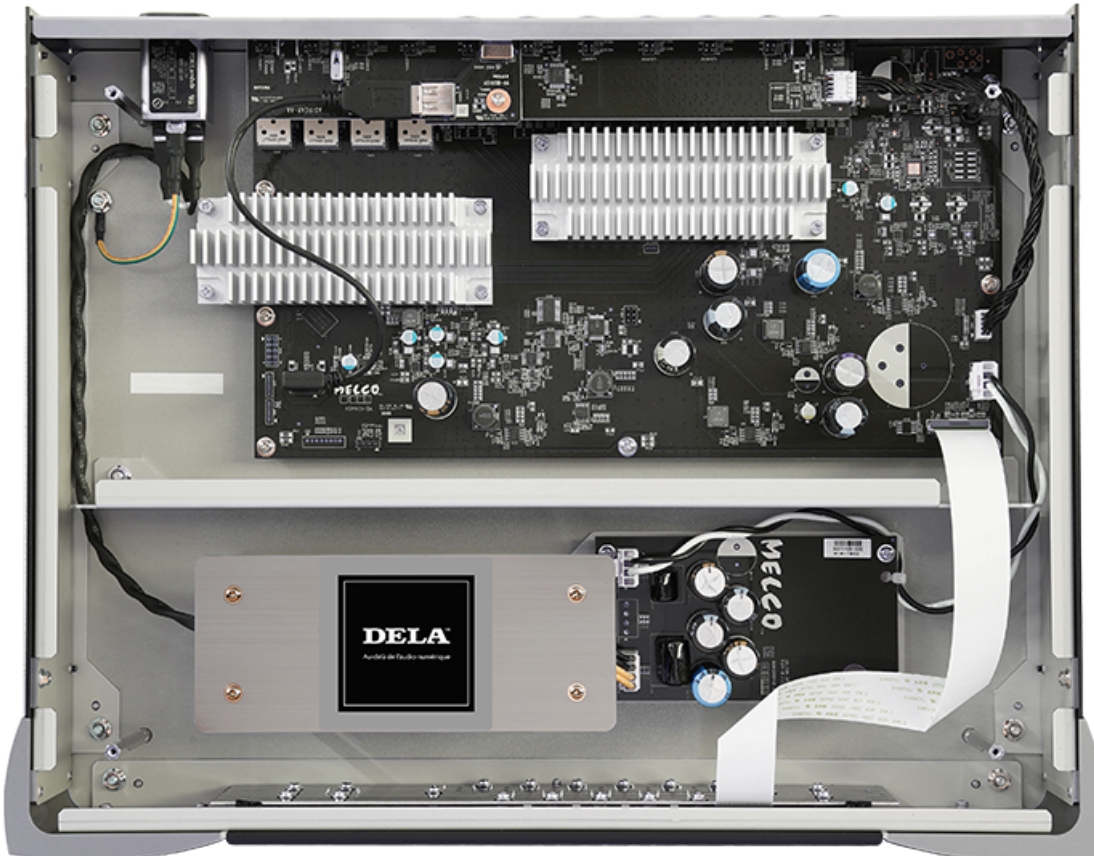
I have been using a Melco S100 switch at home for the last few years. Fed with an optical signal from the ADOT's MC03 SFP (ethernet to fibre) converter, it has been the heart of my streaming system for the past four years. The Melco S100 represents a substantial improvement over entry-level solutions.

The Dela S5 serves as the replacement for the Melco S10, which, only a short time ago, was considered by many to be the best network switch for streamed audio on the market. The £4,999 S50 was a two-box solution, physically and aesthetically resembling the Melco S100, but with an external power supply of similar proportions. At £7,499, the Dela S5 demands significantly more investment, but buyers are rewarded with much-improved casework that will grace any system which includes it.

While it is possible to enjoy streamed music over wi-fi, it is generally inferior to streaming over a hardwired connection to the router. In my experience, the benefits of including a dedicated audiophile-grade network switch are such that one could argue we have now reached the stage where **such a device must be considered an essential part of any high-end streaming system.**

### Build and features

The S5 is pretty well featured for a product of its type. The sole button on my S100 toggles the lights above the rear inputs and outputs. The S5 has one of those, too, but the front panel is graced with no less than 12 buttons. One dims or turns off the display altogether. The remaining 11 activate or defeat each input or output. Further presses take you through a cycle of connection speed options so that you can assess which sounds the best without having to move cables. In addition to my DAC/streamer and music server, I had an Apple TV box and an Oppo Blu-ray player hooked up to the Dela S5. I found that turning off these inputs while listening to music sourced from my Melco/Dela N1-S38 server brought a subtle but worthwhile improvement in performance.



The S5 will sense whether an input or output is connected to a given port. I fed the SFP output from my ADOT MC03 SFP converter via a 5m run of yellow single-mode cable to one of the SFP inputs. If, like me, you are using an SFP converter, the single-mode cable is generally preferred unless your setup requires significant cable bends; in such cases, the orange multi-mode SFP cable will be more reliable. Using an ADOT SFP converter is not a prerequisite. Still, in my setup, it delivers a significant performance boost, possibly because of the length of cable required, given that my router is in another room. I hooked up my Melco/Dela N1 music library to one of the S5's SFP inputs, using one of the brand's C1-N20 copper SFP cables.

The S5's SFP inputs support both 10 Gbps and 1 Gbps, but because the matching device sets the speed and the ADOT will only work at 1 Gbps that is the maximum data rate available for this pairing. The RJ45 ethernet inputs can be set to 1 Gbps, 100 Mbps, or 10 Mbps.

**Hypothetically, the slowest connection speed at which you can maintain an uninterrupted stream should offer the best performance** because it reduces the burden on the components involved. Still, it is worth experimenting to find what works best in your setup. I also found the TV box only worked with the 1 Gbps output.

The Dela S5 is built to a high standard with Neutrik RJ45 ports that can support heavy audiophile connectors. As you can see from the photos, our sample is in the two-tone black-and-silver colour, with all silver as the alternative. The Dela S5 weighs a substantial 9.5kg, much of which is down to the thick steel chassis. The Dela S5's PSU is referred to on their website as the 'DELA Super Clear Dynamic Power Supply,' which I assume is a fancy way of saying it is an advanced switch-mode power supply. In fairness, many companies are heading in this direction, as a good switch-mode power supply can respond more quickly to current demands. The best examples keep noise, which was once a significant issue with such PSUs,



well away from the audible frequency range. Having said all that, it is perhaps telling that the top-of-the-range Dela S1 uses a linear power supply and consequently weighs 4.5 kg more.

### Silent performance

Once you have become accustomed to streamed music unhindered by network noise, it is hard to unhear the effects of such nasties. Substituting the Dela S5 for my far-from-shoddy Melco S100 resulted in a significant performance uplift. Since returning the fabulous combination of the Vitus RI101 Mk2 amp and Oepfi Transcendence 2.5 speakers, my long-term Moon 600i amplifier and Totem Forest Signature speakers have sounded somewhat lacking by comparison. I'm hankering after the Danish combo, but thankfully, the Dela S5 gave my system a much-needed shot in the arm. The greatly reduced network noise significantly improves low-level dynamics and detail, as well as conferring superior soundstage and imaging. The dynamic range is effectively widened, bringing greater definition to quieter musical passages.

I had played Frank Zappa's *Hot Rats* (24/192 download) a couple of days before the Dela S5 arrived. On that occasion, I was somewhat underwhelmed – the music sounded relatively flat and two-dimensional. To say the Dela S5 transformed this into an audiophile recording would be stretching the point. Still, it significantly reduced the production's harsh edges and improved instrumental separation and body no end. The timing also took a leap forward, with notes appearing to start and stop with greater immediacy.

Zappa was so entertaining here that I immediately moved on to his *Over-Nite Sensation* album, again a 24/192 download. The superiority of this album's production was immediately evident, producing a soundstage that was larger in all directions. I do not recall the bass guitar on *Dirty Love* sounding quite so ripe, yet powerful, or the vocals leaping out into the room during previous listens. **Neither do I remember this track sounding quite so lively and dynamic. Impressive stuff.**

A less ancient recording, which I had listened to prior to the S5's arrival, Grant Green's *Idle Moments* (24/192 download), now took on an almost master-tape, cinematic quality. I enjoyed the additional space around each instrument and the wider soundstage. The saxophone had more energy, yet had more body and avoided the hardness that is often the case with digital sources.

My DSD rip of Dead Can Dance's *Into The Labyrinth* SACD often gets mentioned in these pages, but it serves as an excellent reference, as I know the recording inside out. The additional resolution provided by **the Dela S5 makes it clear that this is a great recording**, originally captured in 1993 on analogue tape. The occasional digital artefacts which had lurked in the background during previous listens are all but gone, bringing an almost organic quality. The vocals were now full and ripe, bathing in the natural acoustic present in this recording.

I have, so far, talked about music stored on my Melco N1's SSD drive. It can be hard for many to get their heads around the idea that locally stored files sound better when a good



## Dela S5

network switch is installed between your router and your server, but I have consistently found this to be the case. Having said that, the positive effects of a high-quality network switch are easier to appreciate with cloud-streamed content, such as Qobuz streams.

Hania Rani's album *Ghosts* sounded far more natural and, again, organic when the Dela S5 was working its magic. This was another of those cases where I previously failed to appreciate just how well an album was produced and engineered. It may be the same 24-48 resolution file, but via the S5, it sounded far more transparent and utterly ethereal. Here, the additional texture to the synths and processed violins made the track almost unrecognisable. As with stored



media, **the soundstage expanded and filled the room, but this album also demonstrated additional height information**, which was all but absent with my previous switch.

The increased transparency benefited the lower frequencies as much as the rest of the spectrum. The electronic bassline took on a subtlety in both its texture and timing that was previously absent. The second track Hello worked particularly well. This piece reminds me of Pink Floyd's *On The Run*, with elements of *Welcome To The Machine* from the same band, although it could be coincidental. Hania's vocals are processed here but contain dynamic shifts which were previously merely hinted at.

### Music without noise

In an otherwise well-sorted streaming system, it would be foolish to dismiss the significance of a good network switch. Dela, as Melco, has been around since the start of the streaming revolution, and that experience shows in products like the S5. There are other options around, but none in my experience match the combination of looks, build, and performance of the Dela S5, or, indeed, the magnificent S1.

Products like the Dela S5 help to put streaming, especially of stored media, well ahead of other digital sources and knocking on the door of all but the most capable high-end analogue sources. Unless you have listened to a system which includes a product like the Dela S5, you have not heard the best that network streaming has to offer. You may be quite surprised by just how much performance can be extracted from the medium.



The ear is all about great music and great sound. It is written by hard bitten audio enthusiasts who strive to find the most engaging, entertaining and great value components and music of the highest calibre. This really is what living is all about.