

# Design Challenges and Improvement Techniques for SAR ADC Driver Circuit

Dale Li

High Performance Analog/Field Application

## ABSTRACT

Driver circuit design of switched-capacitor successive approximation register (SAR) analog-to-digital converters (ADC) is critical. The ADS8568 is a typical device using this kind of architecture. The ADS8568's 8-channel, 16-bit, simultaneous sampling ADC with true bipolar input, supports up to 510-KSPS sampling rate per channel. The ADS8568's structure is perfectly suitable for relay measurement and protection systems of industrial power automation applications. This application report presents the solution with the system performance improvement techniques to resolve the challenges of designing the driver circuit for the ADS8568 with comparison tests that also demonstrate these performance improvements.

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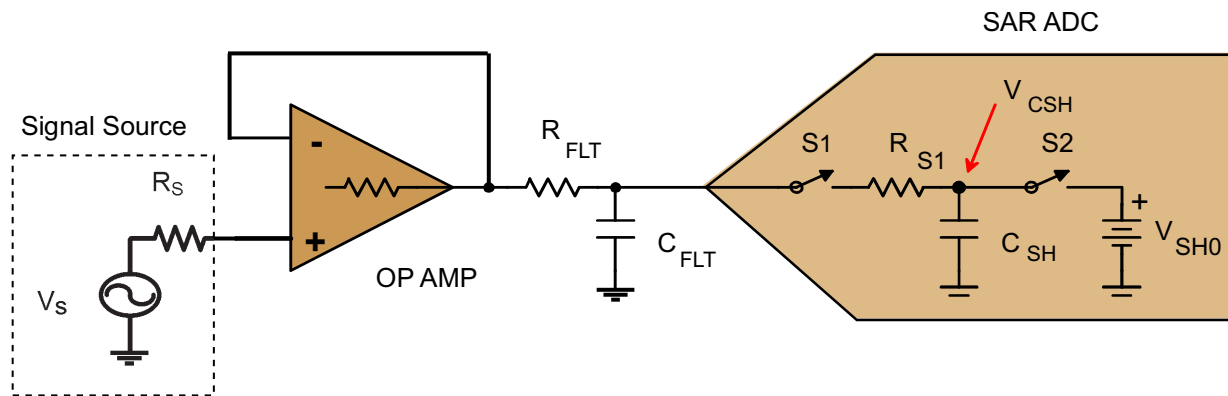
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**1 Introduction**

In power line measurement and protection systems, it is often required to simultaneously sample large numbers of voltage and current channels in multi-phase power distribution and transmission networks and critical to have the simultaneous sampling capability to maintain the phase information between the voltage and current channels. The ADS8568 is the 8-channel, 16-bit simultaneous sampling SAR ADC with true bipolar input up to  $\pm 12$  V; these features make it ideal for capturing voltage and current signals from PT(Voltage Transformer) and CT(Current Transformer) with an operational amplifier or directly in this kind of system application.



**Figure 1. Typical Driver Circuit for SAR ADC**

For optimum SAR-ADC performance, the recommended driver circuit is an operational amplifier used in combination with an RC (resistor-capacitor) filter as shown in Figure 1. This driver circuit’s major functions include:

- Signal conditioning for input signal from the source
- Filter function
- Isolation between the signal source and ADC
- Providing enough charges to the internal sampling capacitor of SAR ADC which uses the switched capacitor array architecture

The driver circuit must have the ability to charge the ADC’s internal input sampling capacitor to the proper value and maintain stability during the ADC’s acquisition period. The  $C_{FLT}$  provides a nearly perfect input source to the SAR ADC.  $R_{FLT}$  keeps the amplifier stable by isolating the amplifier’s output stage from the capacitive load. The selection of components for the driver circuit is important and the proper selections make it possible to get the optimal system performance, including the value selections of  $R_{FLT}$  and  $C_{FLT}$ .

## 2 Design Challenge for a Driver Circuit Without An Amplifier

To simplify the circuit design and save cost, it is popular to design the driver circuit of SAR ADCs without any amplifier in power line measurement and protection systems. Engineers only use one first-order passive RC filter and sometimes a second-order RC filter is used to get faster roll-off and stop-band attenuation.

But if proper care is not taken with system architecture or if the correct value of components  $R_{FLT}$  and  $C_{FLT}$  are not selected, the circuit could produce system errors and the system performance suffers in the area of DC and AC performance, THD (total harmonic distortion), for example. THD is a very important system parameter for industrial replay protection and an important measurement system in power automation applications.

### 2.1 Driver Circuit Without an Amplifier

The circuit in Figure 2 is a typical circuit without a front-end amplifier used widely in industrial replay protection and measurement systems. The second-order RC filter or much larger value  $R_{FLT}$  and  $C_{FLT}$  are often used in this kind of application too, thus providing poor system performance. The operating frequency for CT and PT isolation and measurement transformers is 50 Hz (or 60 Hz). The input signal is usually  $\pm 10$  V or  $\pm 5$ -V bipolar, 50-Hz sine wave from PT or CT (signal source,  $V_s$ ). To filter the noise and get the optimal filter result, the larger value resistor ( $R_{FLT}$ ) and capacitor ( $C_{FLT}$ ) are usually used. This also provides a lower cut-off frequency of the filter. The reason for using this big resistor is the demand of isolation between the SAR ADC and signal resource because there is not any front-end amplifier. In general, 20, 80 or 200 sample points per cycle is often used and depends on system demand, so the sampling rate of the ADC is 1 KSPS, 4 KSPS, or 10 KSPS for a 50-Hz sine-wave input signal.

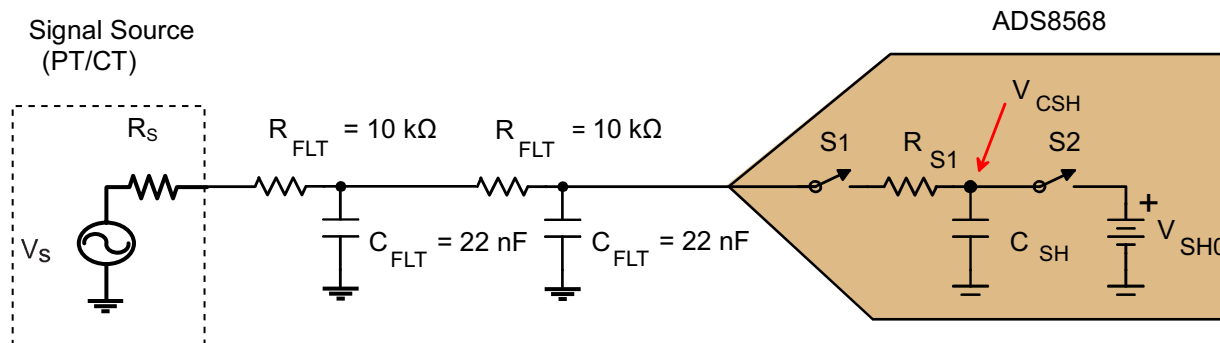


Figure 2. ADS8568's Driver Circuit Without a Front-End Amplifier

After tests, the system performances are bad for this circuit configuration, including THD, SINAD (Signal-to-Noise and Distortion ratio) and SFDR (Spurious Free Dynamic Range) performances. If the filter order is increased, from first order to second order, the performances are worse. If the sampling rate is increased, the performances for the same circuit are much worse.

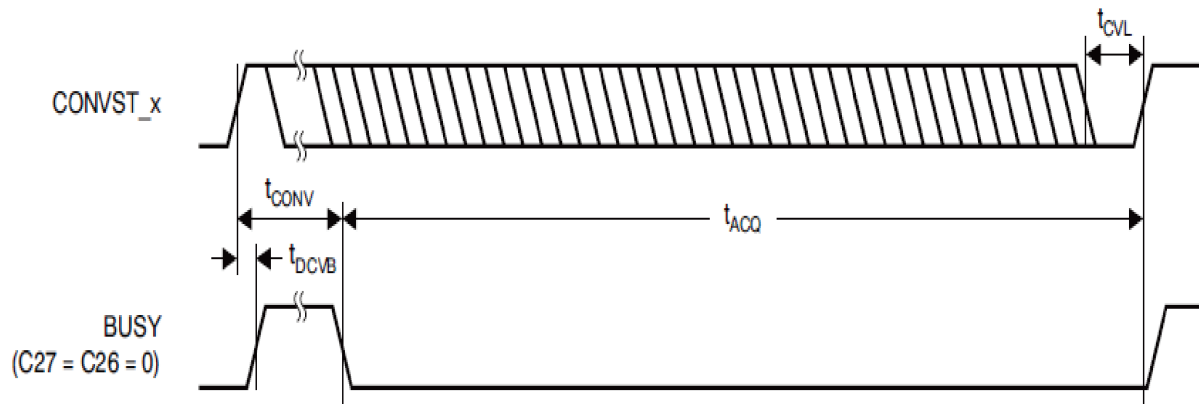
### 2.2 Sampling Rate and Acquisition Time

SAR ADC's sampling rate and acquisition times are important parameters in the design challenges. SAR ADC's sampling rate usually correlates to ADC's acquisition time ( $t_{ACQ}$ ) and conversion time ( $t_{CONV}$ ).

$$T = \frac{1}{f_s} = t_{ACQ} + t_{CONV} \quad (1)$$

$f_s$  is the sampling rate.

For ADS8568,

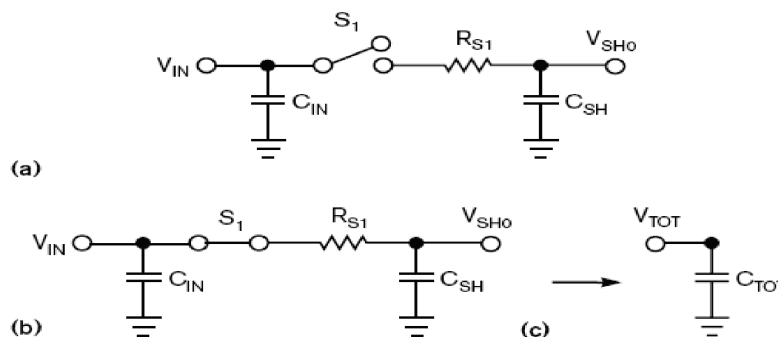

**Figure 3. ADS8568's Acquisition Time and Conversion Time**

The conversion time ( $t_{\text{CONV}}$ , 1.7  $\mu\text{s}$ ) in ADS8568's data sheet is the maximum time the ADS8568 needs for one conversion. The acquisition time ( $t_{\text{ACQ}}$ , 280 ns) in ADS8568's data sheet is the minimum time to specify excellent performance at the highest sampling rate. The real and operating acquisition time to ADC depends on the real sampling rate because the conversion time is approximately fixed and the ADC enters into the acquisition status automatically after the conversion is finished and when the BUSY signal is going down.

### 2.3 Design Challenge for the Driver Circuit

When designing the driver circuit of switched-capacitor input structure SAR ADCs, the time constant ( $\tau_{\text{FLT}}$ ) of the RC filter in front of the ADC or the equivalent time constant ( $\tau_{\text{TOT}}$ ) must be considered. This  $\tau_{\text{FLT}}$  determines the settling time of the filter. This time constant also depends on the acquisition time ( $t_{\text{ACQ}}$ ) and must be properly set so that  $k$  (the time constant multiplier) time constants are allowed during the converter's operating acquisition time.

Figure 4 shows a simplified model for the capacitive input stage of the circuit in Figure 2, if just considering the first-order RC filter (see reference 2).


**Figure 4. Simplified Model for First-Order RC Filter**

Use the following equations according to the charge redistribution between  $C_{\text{FLT}}$  and  $C_{\text{SH}}$ :

$$t_{\text{ACQ}} \geq k_3 \times \tau$$

$$k_3 = \ln\left(\frac{1}{\alpha + 1} \times 2^{N+1}\right), \quad \alpha = \frac{C_{\text{FLT}}}{C_{\text{SH}}} \quad (2)$$

Where  $t_{\text{ACQ}}$  is acquisition time

$k_3$  is new time-constant multiplier

$\tau$  is the time-constant

N is data converter's resolution

For the first-order RC filter system in [Figure 2](#),

$$\alpha = \frac{C_{FLT}}{C_{SH}} = \frac{22 \text{ nF}}{20 \text{ pF}} = 1100 \quad (3)$$

So,

$$k_3 = \ln\left(\frac{1}{\alpha+1} \times 2^{N+1}\right) = \ln\left(\frac{1}{1100+1} \times 2^{16+1}\right) = 4.78 \quad (4)$$

When ADS8568's sampling rate ( $f_s$ ) is 10 KSPS, the operating acquisition time is,

$$t_{ACQ} = \frac{1}{f_s} - t_{CONV} = \frac{1}{10k} \times 10^6 - 1.7\mu s = 98.3\mu s \quad (5)$$

Calculate the required time constant of ADC,

$$\tau_1 \leq \frac{t_{ACQ}}{k_3} = \frac{98.3\mu s}{4.78} = 20.56\mu s \quad (6)$$

When ADS8568's sampling rate ( $f_s$ ) is 4 KSPS, the operating acquisition time is,

$$t_{ACQ} = \frac{1}{f_s} - t_{CONV} = \frac{1}{4k} \times 10^6 - 1.7\mu s = 248.3\mu s \quad (7)$$

Calculate the required time constant of ADC,

$$\tau_2 \leq \frac{t_{ACQ}}{k_3} = \frac{248.3\mu s}{4.78} = 51.95\mu s \quad (8)$$

When ADS8568's sampling rate ( $f_s$ ) is 1 KSPS, the operating acquisition time is,

$$t_{ACQ} = \frac{1}{f_s} - t_{CONV} = \frac{1}{1k} \times 10^6 - 1.7\mu s = 998.3\mu s \quad (9)$$

Calculate the required time constant of ADC:

$$\tau_3 \leq \frac{t_{ACQ}}{k_3} = \frac{998.3\mu s}{4.78} = 208.85\mu s \quad (10)$$

But the time constant of an input circuit using the first-order RC filter configuration in [Figure 2](#), is:

$$\tau_{TOT} = (R_S + R_{FLT}) \times (C_{FLT} + C_{SH}) = 10k\Omega \times (22nF + 20pF) = 220.2\mu s \quad (11)$$

Where  $R_S = 0 \Omega$  and  $C_{SH} = 20 \text{ pF}$  for  $\pm 2 V_{REF}$  input range to ADS8568.

This time constant is larger because of the large values of resistor ( $R_{FLT}$ ) and capacitor ( $C_{FLT}$ ), and observably cannot meet the requirement for [Equation 7](#) and [Equation 8](#), cannot track the voltage of the input signal and cannot charge the ADC's internal sampling capacitor to the proper value during the operating acquisition time, also affecting and limiting system performance. But,  $\tau_{TOT}$  is very close to  $\tau_3$  in [Equation 10](#) and basically does not degrade the performance of the signal chain for the sampling rate in [Equation 10](#). The following comparison tests demonstrate this too.

If a second-order RC filter is used, the time constant is much larger and also cannot meet the requirement of charging the SAR ADC's internal sampling capacitor.

Because no amplifier is used as an active filter in [Figure 2](#), the RC filter acts as all filter functions. The input signal from power lines is only a 50-Hz frequency signal, so to get a better filter effect, the low cut-off frequency RC filter is often used. That is why the larger resistor and capacitor values are selected. The cut-off frequency of the first-order RC filter designed in [Figure 2](#) is:

$$f_{-3dB} = \frac{1}{2\pi(R_S + R_{FLT})C_{FLT}} = \frac{1}{2\pi \times 10k \times 22nF} = 723.4\text{Hz} \quad (12)$$

Sometimes, the lower cut-off frequency RC filter is used; for example, 361.7 Hz with 20-k $\Omega$  resistor and 22-nF capacitor.

So for the driver circuit design of the switched-capacitor input structure SAR ADC without any front-end amplifier, it is critical to consider the trade-off between the time constant and the cut-off frequency of the filter, it is also a challenge to balance this trade-off.

## 2.4 Improvement Techniques

The time constant is determined directly by the values of resistor  $R_{FLT}$  and capacitor  $C_{FLT}$  or the amount of filter order. From Equation 2, two techniques are used to meet this equation, to resolve the system performance issue and challenge in the circuit in Figure 2, increasing the acquisition time ( $t_{ACQ}$ ) of ADC directly and decreasing the filter orders or the component value of the RC filter.

### 2.4.1 Increase Acquisition Time

According to Equation 1, the sampling rate ( $f_s$ ) of SAR ADC is reduced to increase the acquisition time ( $t_{ACQ}$ ). The acquisition time can be increased from 98.3  $\mu s$  to 248.3  $\mu s$  by reducing the sampling rate from 10 KSPS to 4 KSPS, furthermore, to 998.3  $\mu s$  with a 1 KSPS sampling rate. These have been calculated in Section 2.3 and the following comparison tests also demonstrate the system performance improvement with acquisition time extension.

### 2.4.2 Decrease the Filter Orders and Component Value

Another technique resolving this performance issue is reducing the filter order amount or the values of resistor ( $R_{FLT}$ ) and capacitor ( $C_{FLT}$ ) directly. These techniques absolutely decrease the time constant in Equation 1. The RC filter orders can be reduced from second order to first order, the capacitor value also can be reduced from 22-nF to 820-pF. The following comparison tests also demonstrate the system performance improvement by reducing the RC filter orders and the capacitor value. The big resistor is reserved because of the isolation requirement.

## 3 Performance Test

### 3.1 Test System

Figure 5 shows the typical test system for AC performance in this report. The software for this report was developed with Code Composer Studio™ V3.3 based on TI's TMS320F28335 Digital Signal Processor (DSP™) with an ADS8568 test board. The FFT wave forms are created in ADCPro software, which is available for download from the Texas Instruments website [www.ti.com](http://www.ti.com).

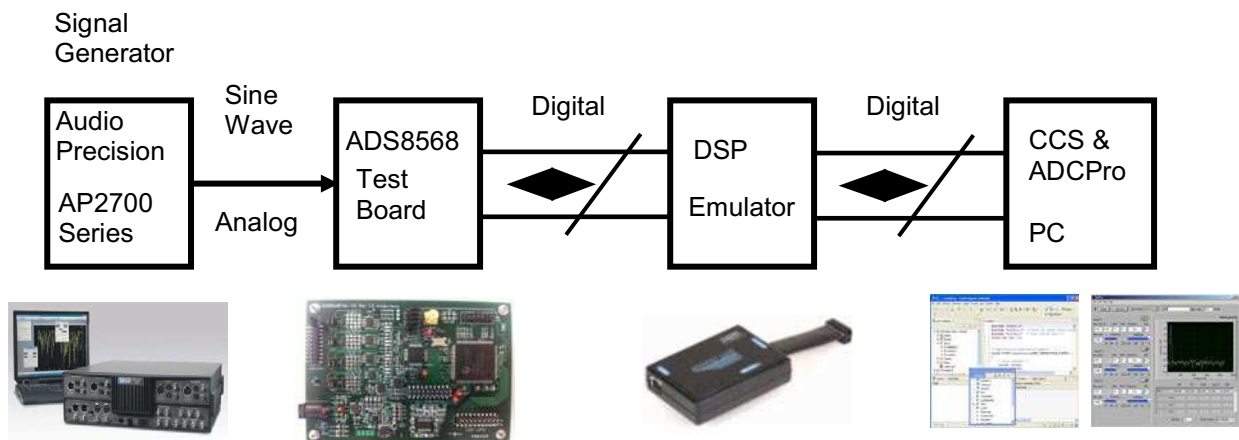


Figure 5. Performance Test System for the ADS8568 Circuit

### 3.2 Performance Comparison Test

The following tests are based on the same circuit board. The test signal,  $V_s$ , is the high-performance, low-distortion, bipolar and 50-Hz sine-wave signal from the SYS-2722 generator of Audio Precision. The  $-0.5$  dBFS signal amplitude of  $V_s$  is used for the following tests in [Table 1](#) through [Table 3](#).

The FFT waveforms for these test data are shown in [Section 6](#) through [Section 8](#).

[Table 1](#) is the system AC performance results based on the original design in [Figure 2](#) with a second-order RC filter ( $R_{FLT} = 10 \text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 22 \text{ nF}$ ). The system AC performance tests are done based on different sampling rates of the ADS8568; 1 KSPS, 4 KSPS, and 10 KSPS for 20, 80, and 200 sample points per cycle of sine wave. From the test data, the lower sampling rate for the same driver configuration, also the longer acquisition time, and the better system AC performance, especially for THD, SINAD, and SFDR is shown. The THD is improved from  $-65.46$  dB with 10 KSPS sampling rate to  $92.80$  dB with 1 KSPS sampling rate.

**Table 1. Test Result for Second-Order Filter –  $R_{FLT} = 10 \text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 22 \text{ nF}$  (unit: dBc)**

Sampling Speed	SNR	THD	SINAD	SFDR
10 KSPS	85.05	$-65.46$	65.41	67
4 KSPS	84.69	$-74.74$	74.32	76.2
1 KSPS	86.35	$-92.80$	85.47	94.1

If reducing the filter orders from second to first order of the RC filter in [Figure 2](#), the same tests are finished and the new test results are listed in [Table 2](#). The measurement results show that increasing the acquisition time, reducing the sampling rate from 10 KSPS to 1 KSPS, improves the system AC performance. With the longer acquisition time, the THD improves from  $-79.97$  dB to  $-100.88$  dB. The test results in [Table 2](#) also prove the performance improvement with the time constant reduction by reducing the filter orders.

**Table 2. Test Result for First-Order Filter –  $R_{FLT} = 10 \text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 22 \text{ nF}$  (unit: dBc)**

Sampling Speed	SNR	THD	SINAD	SFDR
10 KSPS	85.92	$-70.97$	70.83	73.3
4 KSPS	85.32	$-82.32$	80.56	84.6
1 KSPS	86.96	$-100.88$	86.79	105.8

For the first-order filter, continue reducing the value for  $C_{FLT}$  from 22-nF to 820-pF, the test results in [Table 3](#) for this configuration show that the system AC performance is significantly improved. With the lower sampling rate and longer acquisition time, the THD improves from  $-96.88$  dB to  $-103.61$  dB. The THD and SFDR performances are much better than before, especially for same higher sampling rate, the improvement in THD is approximately 26 dB from 22-nF to 820-pF CFLT.

**Table 3. Test Result for First-Order Filter –  $R_{FLT} = 10 \text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 820 \text{ pF}$  (unit: dBc)**

Sampling Speed	SNR	THD	SINAD	SFDR
10 KSPS	86.08	$-96.88$	85.73	106.8
4 KSPS	85.03	$-99.30$	84.87	105.8
1 KSPS	85.56	$-103.61$	85.49	107.4

These measurement results show and prove that the length of the acquisition time, the RC filter orders and the value of components in the RC filter, affect the system performance. The system improvement is obvious by decreasing the sampling rate and reducing the filter orders and the value of the components of the filter.

## 4 Conclusion

This application report presents the popular driver circuits without an amplifier to SAR ADC in industrial application, discusses the challenges along with the driving circuit of the switched-capacitor input structure SAR ADC, and analyzes the root reason and trade-offs between the performance demand and RC filter design. Based on the input signal, ADC's sampling rate, input capacitor and resistor of filter, and the system performance demand, it is important to balance these critical conditions. Two improvement techniques are introduced with demonstration tests in this report. This application report is also suitable for the ADS8548 and ADS8528, TI's SAR ADCs.

## 5 References

1. ADS8568, ADS8548, ADS8528 Data Sheet ([SBAS543A](#))
2. Oljaca, M. and B. Baker. (2007). External components improve SAR-ADC accuracy. EDN. June 7, 2007. Download at: [www.edn.com/article/CA4314401](http://www.edn.com/article/CA4314401)



6 Appendix A. FFT for Second-Order Filter ( $R_{FLT} = 10\text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 22\text{ nF}$ )

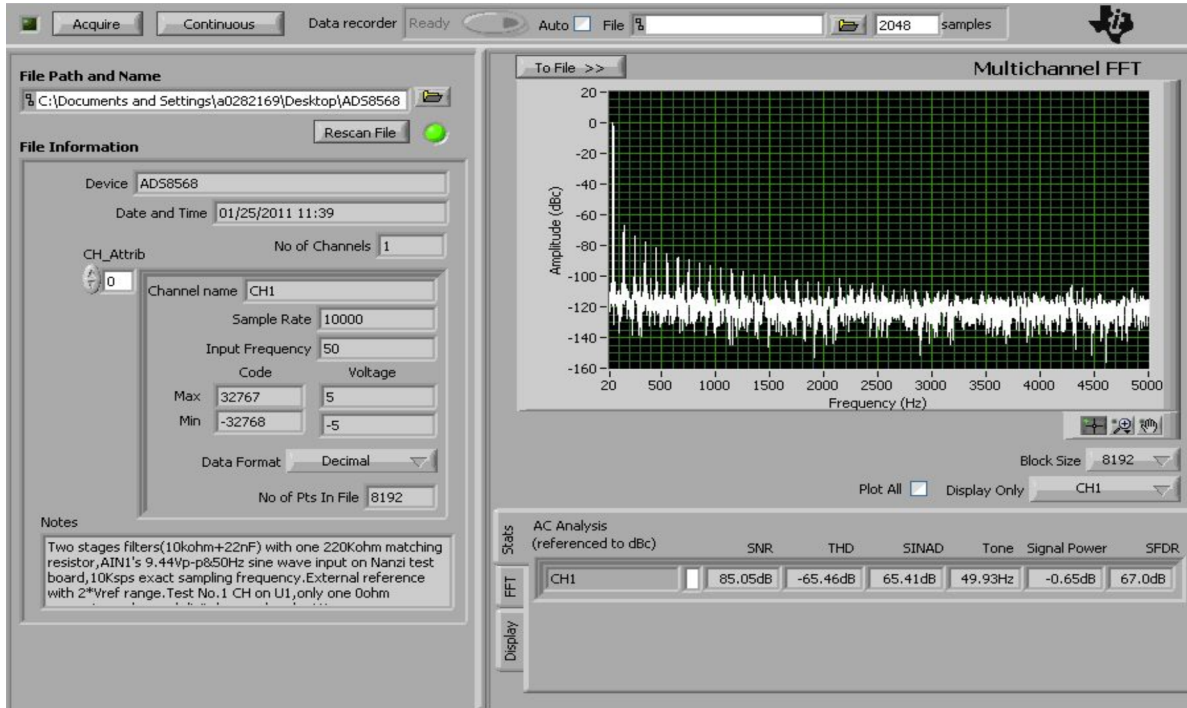


Figure 6. FFT for 10-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

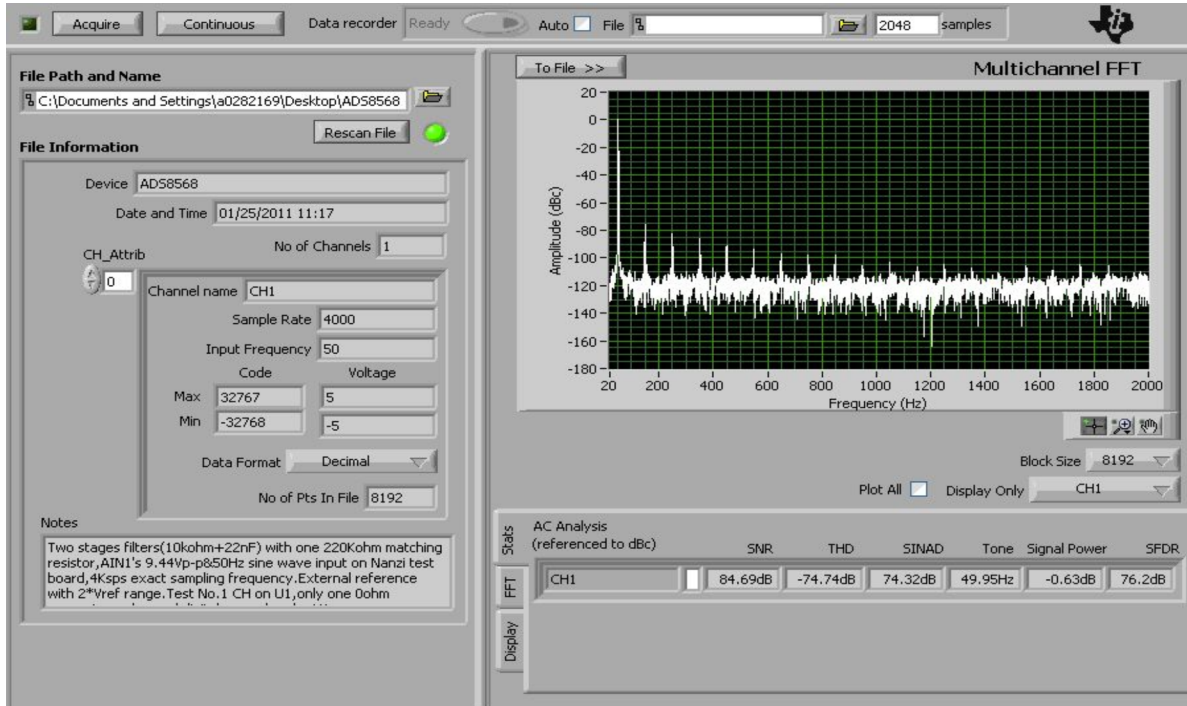


Figure 7. FFT for 4-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

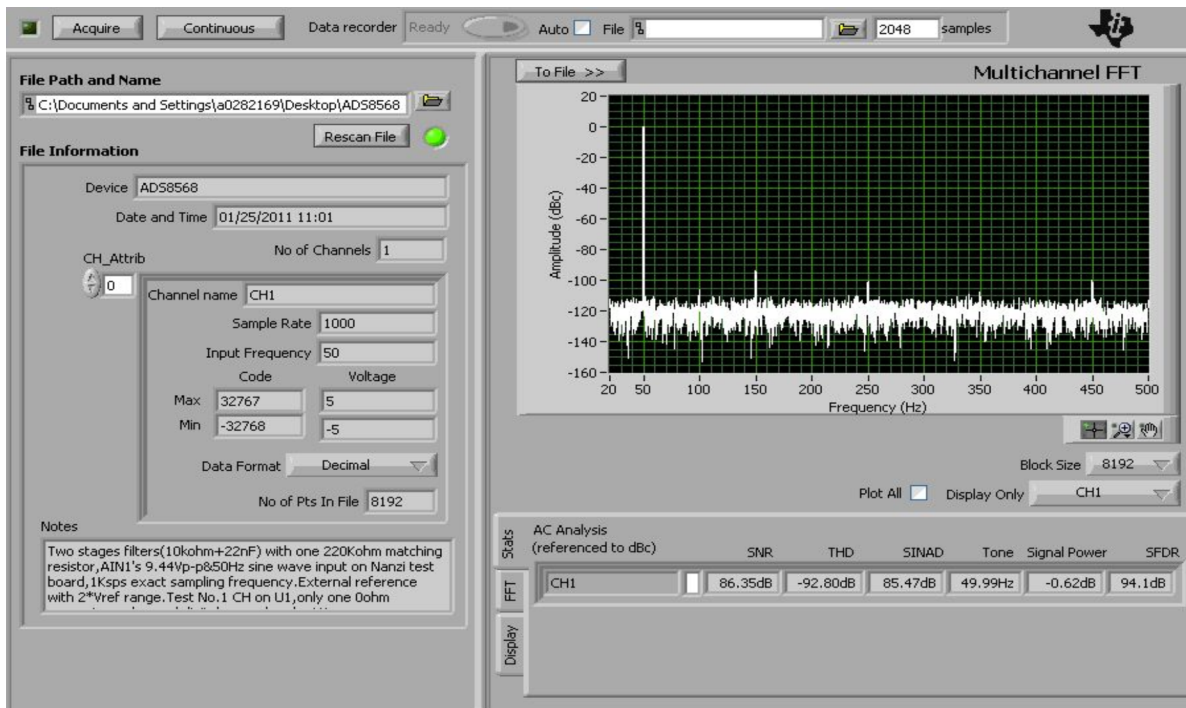


Figure 8. FFT for 1-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

7 Appendix B. FFT for First-Order Filter ( $R_{FLT} = 10\text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 22\text{ nF}$ )

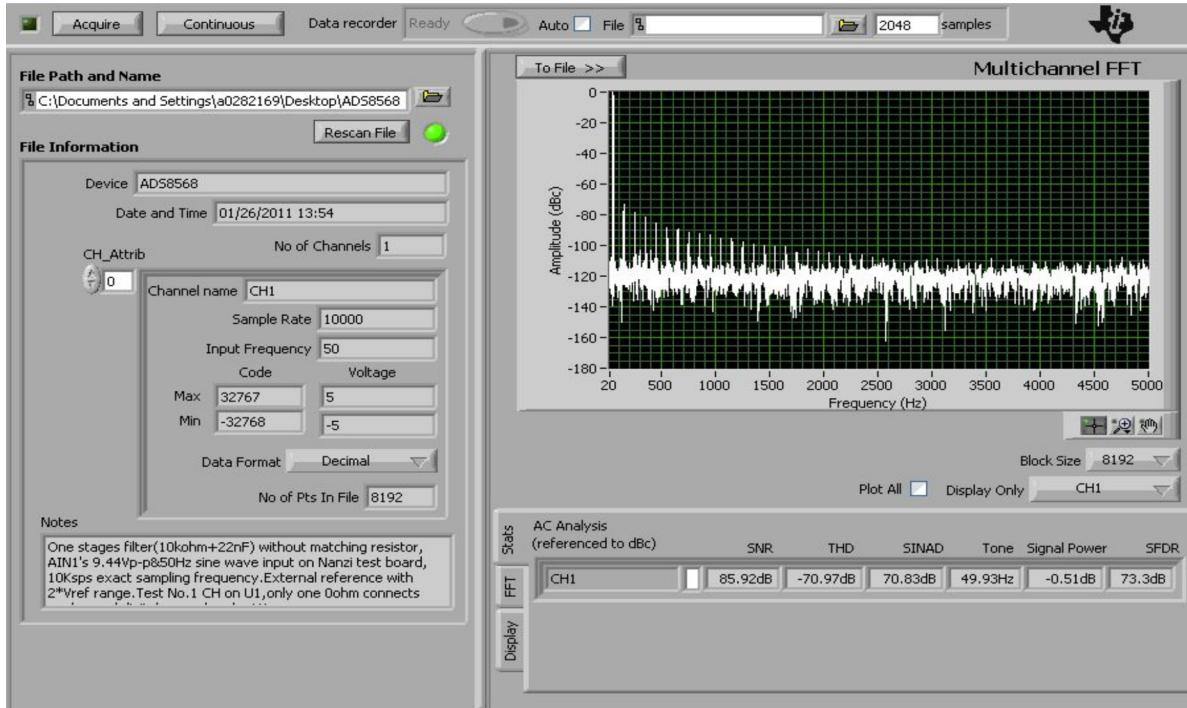


Figure 9. FFT for 10-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

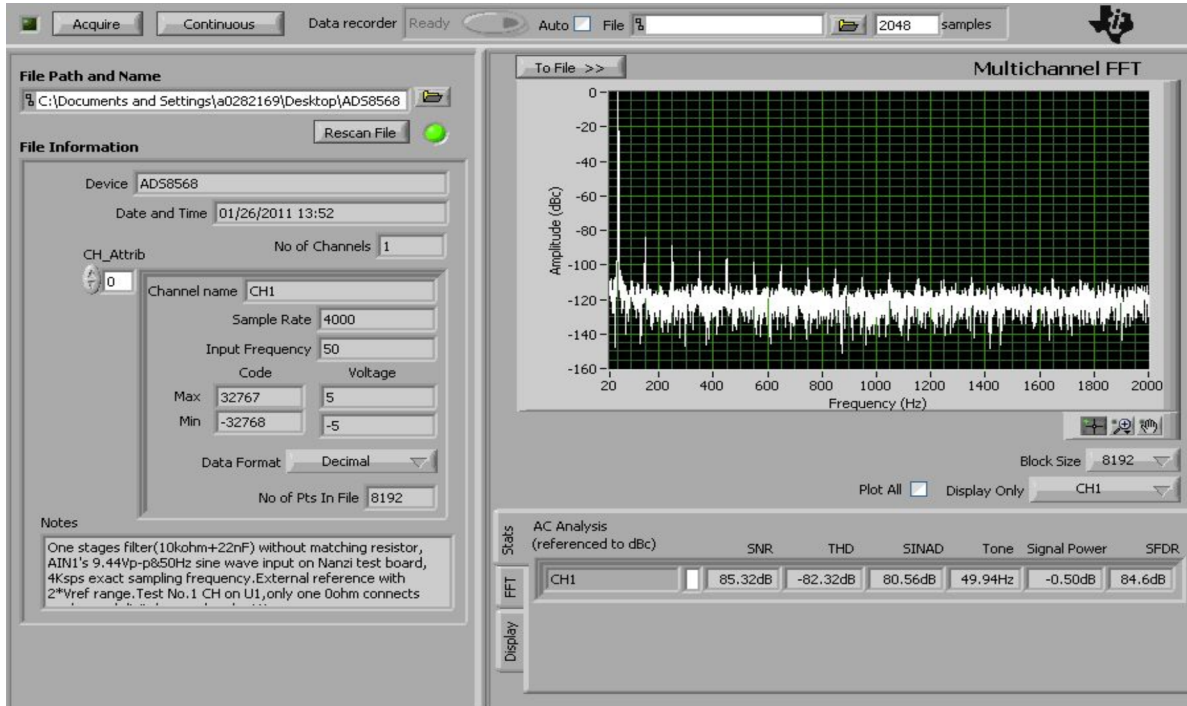


Figure 10. FFT for 4-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

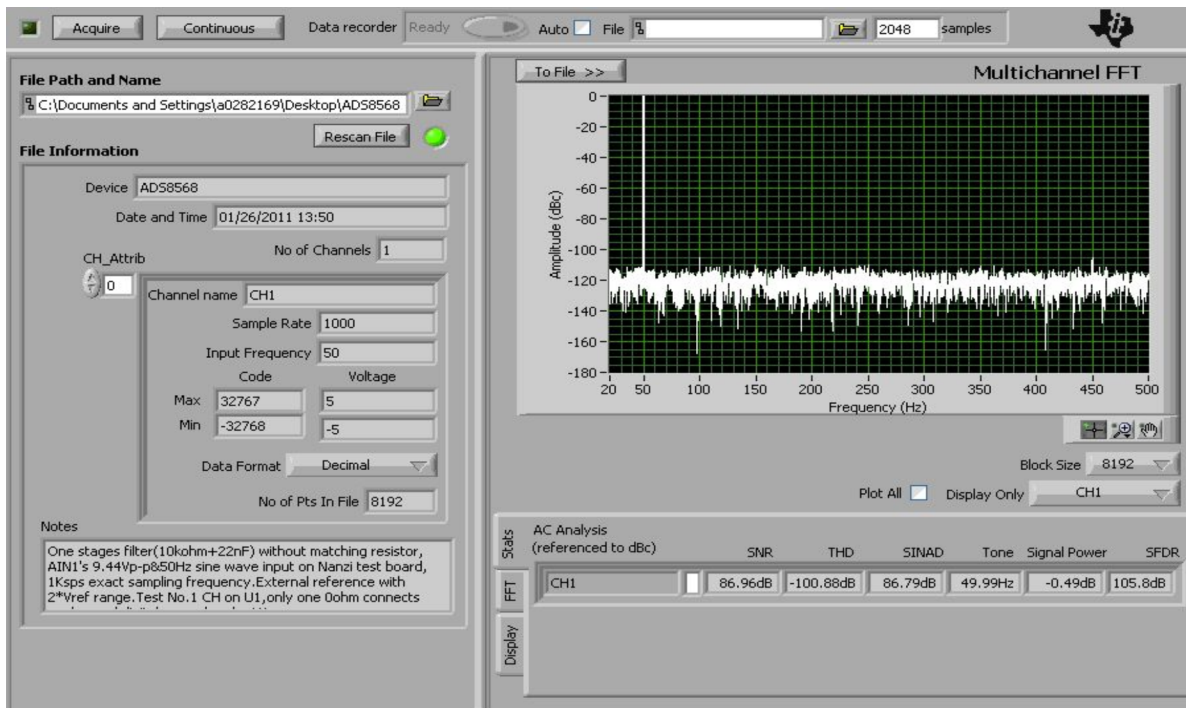


Figure 11. FFT for 1-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

8 Appendix C. FFT for First-Order Filter ( $R_{FLT} = 10\text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $C_{FLT} = 820\text{ pF}$ )

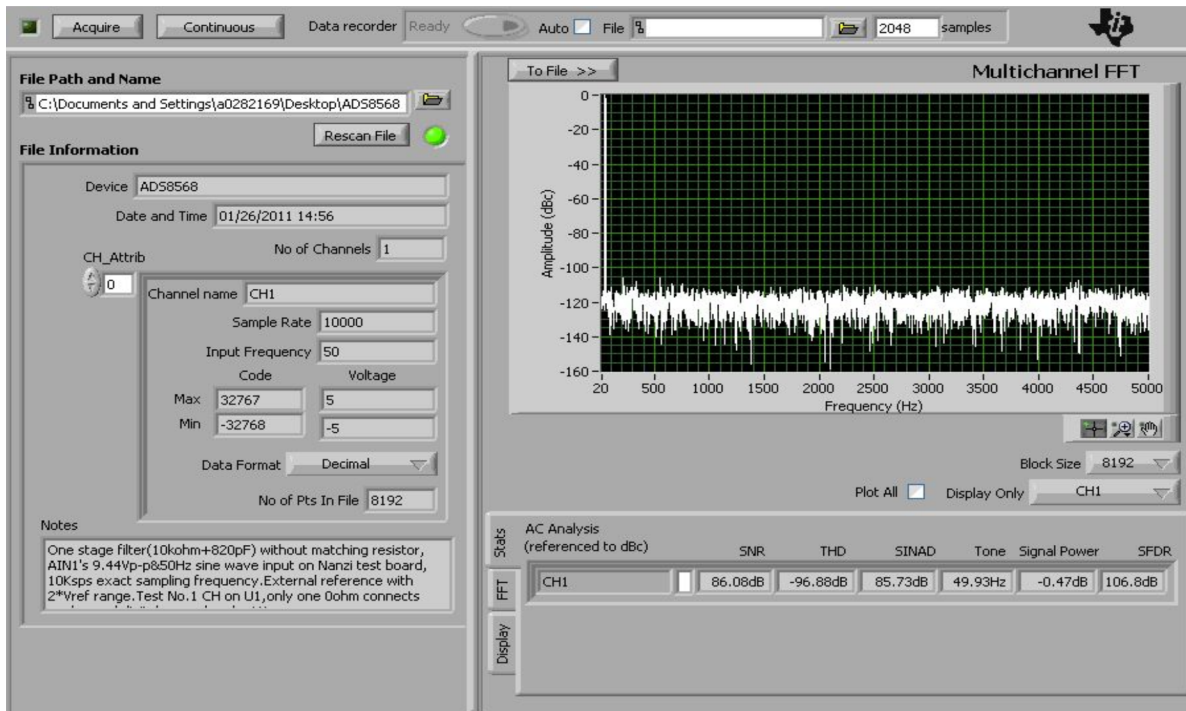


Figure 12. FFT for 10-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

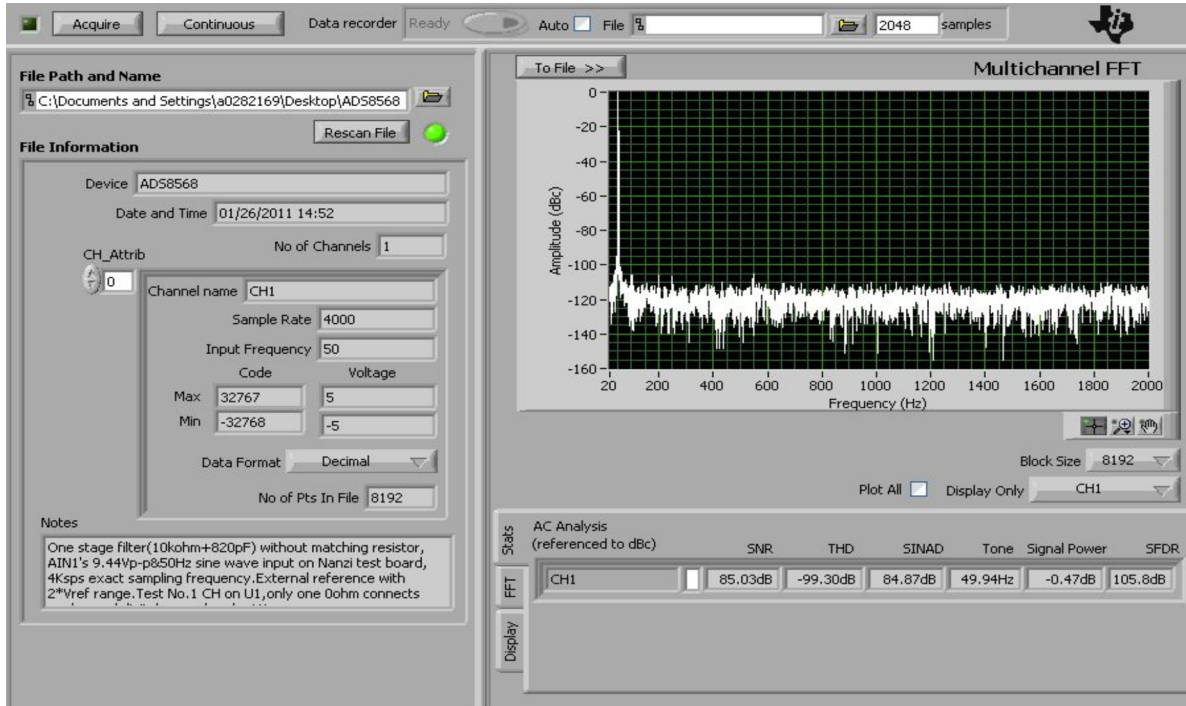


Figure 13. FFT for 4-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5\text{ dBFS}$ )

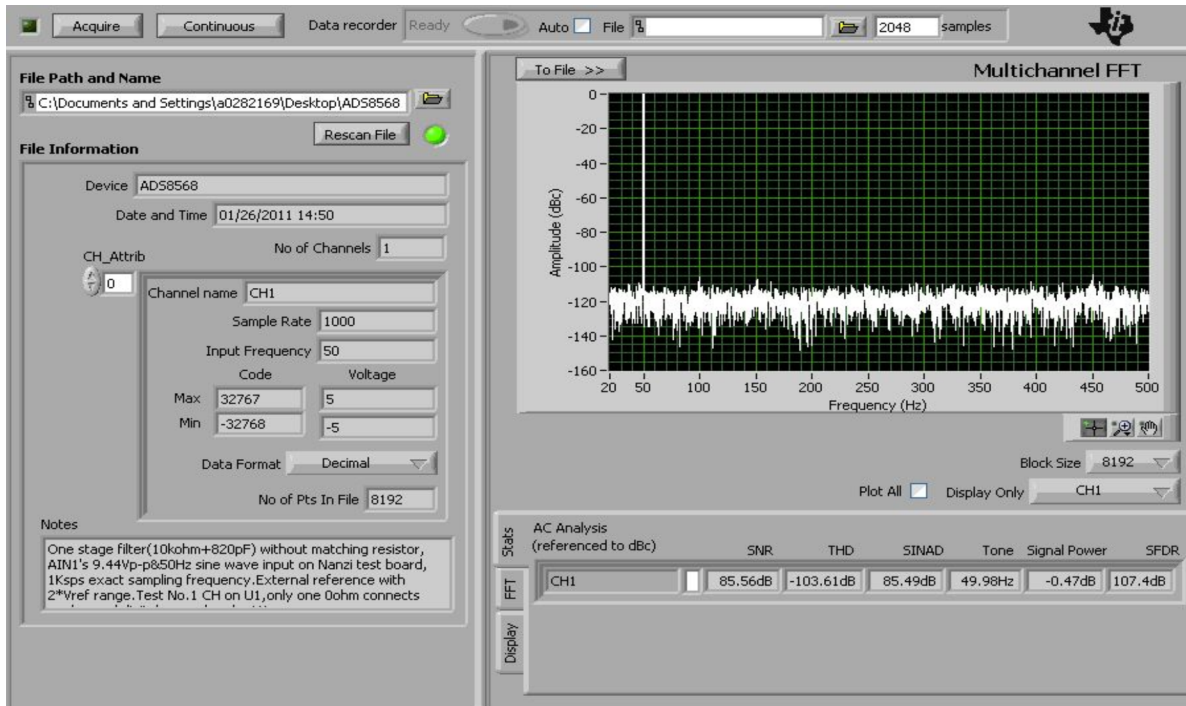


Figure 14. FFT for 1-KSPS Sampling Rate ( $V_s = -0.5$  dBFS)

## Revision History

Changes from Original (November 2012) to A Revision	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changed format to latest TI application report template. ....</li> </ul>	1

NOTE: Page numbers for previous revisions may differ from page numbers in the current version.

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