



# Cable Care

**In the market for value-for-money speaker cable? Paul Rigby listens to twelve of the best circa-£100 types...**

**O**ne of the most contentious areas within all hi-fi is the cable: interconnect or speaker. Manoeuvre any hi-fi fan onto the subject and strong views will pour forth. Some say that cables are nothing but a con, others swear by their favourites, some proclaim that cable sound quality should not vary and talk technical to explain their position, while others spend more money on cables than actual hardware because of the improvement that they hear - or should that be think they hear?

I was once sceptical about the whole issue of cable sound quality differences, but performing A-B tests on this wide range of cables only served to convince me otherwise. Cables make a difference...a big difference. Not just in terms of

changing the 'tone' of the music snaking its way through your hi-fi but also, in more practical and definitive terms, in how they handle 'distortion'. In this way, cables can obviously affect dynamic range, clarity and soundstage of any hi-fi.

This month, we are looking at twelve pairs of speaker cables around the £100 mark - a crucial price point and one that serves as a first serious entry into the cable accessory field.

Battling it out this month is the Audioquest Type 2, Chord Carnival Silver Screen, TALK Cables TALK 3, Russ Andrews Kimber Kable 4PR, Black Rhodium Twist, Tellurium Q Blue, Wireworld Luna 16/4, HiDiamond Diamond 1, Clear Audio Copper-line Alpha, TCI Diamondback, Fisual Havana FX and Van Den Hul's The Arctic.

#### THE CONTENDERS:

|                               | PRICE        |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| FISUAL HAVANA FX              | £48/3M       |
| AUDIOQUEST TYPE 2             | £60/3M       |
| TALK CABLES TALK 3            | £64/3M       |
| BLACK RHODIUM TWIST           | £71/3M       |
| TELLURIUM Q BLUE              | £82.50/3M    |
| CHORD CARNIVAL SILVER SCREEN  | £85/3M       |
| RUSS ANDREWS KIMBER KABLE     | 4PR £85/3.5M |
| WIREWORLD LUNA 16/4           | £93/3M       |
| TCI DIAMONDBACK               | £108/3M      |
| HIDIAMOND DIAMOND 1           | £110/3M      |
| CLEAR AUDIO COPPER-LINE ALPHA | £130/3M      |
| VDH THE ARCTIC                | £140/3M      |

#### TEST SYSTEM:

T+A G10/SME 9/Benz Glider turntable  
Trichord Dino phono amp  
Cambridge 651A integrated amplifier  
XTZ CD-100/11 CD player  
Chord Anthem 2 interconnects  
Hi-Fi Racks Podium shelf  
AE Radiance One speakers  
Atacama HMS 1 stands

TELLURIUM Q BLUE £82.50/3M



**VERDICT** ●●●●●

A cable based upon an anti-distortive design and it shows via its magnificent sound quality.

**TELLURIUM Q BLUE £82.50/3M**

TelluriumQ

+44 (0)1458 251997

www.telluriumq.com

**FOR**

- clarity
- focus
- soundstage
- overall sound quality

**AGAINST**

- nothing

While the Tellurium Blue speaker cable is the company's entry level speaker cable, what it's made from is a closely guarded secret. As is its design. When asked, the company basically refused to reveal all. So, apart from confirming the blue colour, that's your lot.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Listening to the Black Rhodium Twist, it seemed hardly possible that any other cable could exceed its performance but the Blue does just that. It seemed that, whatever the

Twist could do, the Blue could do it slightly better starting with that 3D soundstage which had tremendous depth but was coupled with even greater focus that seemed to actually repair the damaging compression on the Sugababes' track. Such was the attention to detail from the Tellurium Q Blue.

The positives just kept on coming. Bass was tight and punchy, treble no longer hurt my ears during vocal climaxes. The midrange was so tightly controlled that no extraneous frequencies caused by peak limiting escaped the mix.

Moving to the Sam Cooke vinyl

which was, via the Blue, at its most expressive, making the likes of the Audioquest offensive in comparison while the Fisual was asked to politely give way when compared directly. The backing orchestra, behind Cooke, eased its way through the track like a gently flowing river, such was the smoothness of the overall delivery. The snare drum held a sense of being tonally 'right' while the strings almost dripped with emotion. Also, for the first time, the subtly placed flute played a more integrated part of the mix rather than sounding out on a limb.

Finally, the Crippled Black Phoenix CD took on an ordered soundstage, everything was where it should be, giving a panoramic view of the soundstage. In fact, the music sounded like it was just that, on stage, via a uniform presentation. Bass was impressive via its large mass while the lower mids, though the electric guitar, were dramatic and forceful. This time, the Pastoral slices, interspersing the heavier prog rock, were found to be more complex.

CHORD CARNIVAL SILVER SCREEN £85/3M



**VERDICT** ●●●●●

A vinyl-only cable that loves the more precise music output such as jazz, where it can display its inherent, meticulous, nature.

**CHORD CARNIVAL SILVER SCREEN £85/3M**

Chord Company

+44 (0)1980 625700

www.chord.co.uk

**FOR**

- thorough presentation
- anti-distortive design
- controlled delivery

**AGAINST**

- recessed mids
- careful source matching

Like the Audioquest, the Chords have been created so that the wire arrives in a twisted configuration to enhance the sound quality and to minimise distortion.

The wires themselves are presented as fifteen gauge, multi-stranded oxygen free copper (OFC) with polyethylene (zero halogen) shielding. Chord say that the cable is surrounded by PVC to minimise mechanical noise.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The first thought, when listening to the Chords was just how darned polite the were. There was none of the raucous behaviour advocated

by the Audioquest and certainly none of the 'irresponsible', flighty upper midrange of the Fisuals. The Chords were very well behaved — the sort of cables, in fact, that you could introduce to your mother. For example, bass didn't run too low to be nasty and grinding but had sufficient quantity to keep the track ticking over. Upper frequencies didn't sparkle but supplied enough information to keep you well informed. On the other hand, the nasty stridency of the Sugababes' track was kept in-line with enough anti-distortive measures to prevent too many harsh frequencies hurting your ears.

These attributes worked more efficiently and more effectively with vinyl than they did with CD, with which the Chords proved more compatible. Cooke's vocals had none of the unruly bloom of the Audioquest and, while it also didn't have the detail of the Fisual, it did have an inherent musicality that came to the fore within the analogue medium. An easy going, swing jazz track that was hip but precise, the Chords were a little bit OCD in that they craved order and were scrupulous in how the music was presented with special attention given to the source quality and type.

Moving to the Cripple Black Phoenix CD, the Chord's reserved nature proved difficult for it to truly let its hair down. A slightly recessed midrange and less than expressive bass damaged musicality, reigning in emotion and keeping a lid on the excitement. That said, its anti-distortive design showed immediately in the tight bass performance that allowed space to be revealed around it, giving other dynamics a chance to flourish.



**A**nd they say that there's no difference in sound between cables. Fooye! That cables are used purely to change the tone of the sound and nothing more. Fiddlesticks! This group test revealed genuine, constructive (and destructive) changes in sound quality that could easily be attributed to a major change in hi-fi hardware.

Beginning in reverse order and a range of cables that are angled more towards niche markets. The Audioquest Type 2, Russ Andrews Kimber Kable 4PR, Clear Audio Copper-line Alpha and Chord Carnival Silver Screen all take a specific aspect of hi-fi reproduction and focus upon that. The Audioquest is a brilliant party animal with big, meaty, powerful bass that loves to rock while the Clearer adopts a very similar attitude, bringing the musicality, the overall tone of high energy music, to the fore very successfully. The Chord and Kimber cables are all about order and control and are wonderful cables for those hi-fi chains that need to be reined in. Acting like sheep dogs, the pair are highly recommended to bring a sense of calm to a hi-fi system.

Next, the HiDiamond Diamond I and TCI Diamondback start from a similar position to the Audioquest but add more mature and balanced flavours to provide a better overall sound but with that essential strength in musicality with high impact.

The TALK Cables TALK 3 receive a very respectable sixth place, largely due to its tremendous soundstaging abilities along with its fine, general sonic abilities while the Wireworld Luna 16/4 provides a creditable fifth due to its many sonic highlights. Wireworld are on the right lines with this cable that should be on all demo lists due to its ability to connect with different hi-fi system types.

The Fisual Havana FX deserves a prize all of its own. The cheapest cable here, but fourth place? This is a cable that does so much right and what it cannot do it rightly leaves well alone

rather than disrupting its delicate sonic balance. For the price? A quite remarkable design.

Third place goes to the Van Den Hul's The Arctic, a cable that has obviously been designed by experienced, knowledgeable and practised engineers. It's just frustrating that the cable got so close but fell at

these endeavours means that other cables' performance is patchy at best whereas Black Rhodium and Tellurium not only save time in targeting the problems on a design level (just see how restrained and basic each cable looks compared to the complex and large girthed competitors) but they also save money which means

'the pair achieve great quality sound with cables offering both effectiveness and efficiency'

the last hurdle.

The top two cables in this test might not be the most expensive on show here but they are both ahead of the rest in terms of performance. The fact that they attack, head on, the distortion problem means that the extraneous noise and associated rubbish that hangs onto the sonic output, restricting dynamic response and squeezing the clarity factor, is tackled straight away.

The pair achieve great quality sound with cables offering both effectiveness and efficiency. Both the Black Rhodium Twist and the Tellurium Q Blue don't mess around. Which infers that the other cable manufacturers are almost feeling around in the dark, not quite sure what the problem is, not too sure how to tackle it and, hey, if they stumble upon certain elements that provide a few right answers then that's a welcome bonus. The result of

that you don't have to spend money supporting inefficient research efforts.

The Black Rhodium Twist is a super cable. So simple to look at, beautifully designed and so easy on the ear with a remarkable price. It should be demoed even if you have an expensive hi-fi system. Such is the cable's general superiority. With one exception...

In absolute terms, the Tellurium Q Blue pips the Black Rhodium Twist to the top. The difference in performance is not massive but it is there. The Blue, over the entire frequency range and in all areas, just beats the Twist to the top in every category. It drains even more distortion from music, producing a superior soundstage and instrumental separation, it delivers a devastating degree of clarity, a greater amount of transparency and a class-leading focus that never fails to surprise. The Tellurium Q Blue is a great cable.

