

## Review: Kimber cable Carbon Series – Kimber Carbon 8, Kimber Carbon 16 & Kimber Carbon Interconnect

May 5, 2021



Review: Kimber cable Carbon Series – The poppy seed braid from the bakery around the corner costs 1.19 euros. The copper braids from Utah to be tested are all in the three- and four-digit price range (833 euros to 5,950 euros, <https://www.kimber.de/> with online shop). I can sense how one or the other reader, when looking at the Kimber-Carbon-Binder, raises his eyebrows prematurely and skeptically – and lets his heart fly to the bakery trade. I don't like poppy-seed braids myself, I get up – it tastes better than it reads – spelled rolls and appreciate high-quality audio strips even more: My components are connected accordingly with selected cables (see "Equipment box" at the end of the test), which are meanwhile Proven over many years, also in direct A / B comparisons.

### KIMBER CABLE CARBON SERIES – KIMBER CARBON 8, KIMBER CARBON 16 & KIMBER CARBON INTERCONNECT: TECHNOLOGY & CONCEPT

My home team, which is mainly made up of representatives from WSS, HMS and Straight Wire, is accordingly relaxed about the challengers from Utah. But before things get sporty in the listening room, I would like to introduce you to our American guests – two loudspeaker cables and one NF cable – because they are by no means commonplace:

41 years old, more than 50 employees and active on more than 46,000 square meters of factory space: The audio cable specialist Kimber Kable, based north of Salt Lake City, in the town of Ogden with 90,000 inhabitants, is undoubtedly one of the most renowned and "powerful" representatives his guild. The copper conductors for the carbon cables are obtained from American specialist

suppliers, but the carbon from which it is named is incorporated into the cables “in-house” by means of a complicated process.

The manufacturer’s declared conductivity of the copper used in the Kimber carbon cables of 102% according to the International Annealed Copper Standard (100% IACS corresponds to 58 MS / m, the actually typical conductance for copper) indicates its high quality. For comparison: Silver, which is much more expensive than the optimal conductor, would come to 106% (61 MS / m) according to IACS. More interesting and a stronger unique selling point than the sheer conductor quality is the carbon treatment that the new Kimber cable series receives: The seven copper strands of the Kimber Carbon 8, Carbon 16 and Carbon Interconnect are each made entirely of carbon (means: carbon fiber reinforced plastic, the word carbon has become colloquially naturalized for this composite material) and thereby isolated from each other.

The speaker cables Kimber Carbon 16 (above) and Kimber Carbon 8 differ in the number of conductor strands or the overall cross-section. The seven individual conductors of each Kimber carbon cable are each completely enclosed by the inserted carbon and come with differently defined cross-sections (the illustration with four cross-sections is only for demonstration purposes). The different cross-sections come from Kimber’s “VariStrand technology” and are intended to provide a more linear transmission of the different frequency ranges. Image: Kimber Cable



The Kimber Carbon Interconnect (here in the Cinch version) is based on two insulated conductor strands, which in turn consist of seven VariStrand copper strands each (Cinch or XLR from 833 euros – at 0.5 meters each)

Carbon is considered torsion-resistant, light and has optimal dielectric properties for cable production. Kimber expects a whole range of sound-enhancing advantages from this material – as that: the minimization of intrinsic and external vibrations (increasing tendency of the conductors to vibrate with increasing current flow or loudspeaker noise) as well as electrostatic charges between metal conductors and insulators, and electromagnetic interference should be kept in check which can have an effect both from the outside through so-called Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) and from within through the constantly changing music signal itself.

The elaborate braided construction that has always been typical of Kimber cables is basically aimed at very similar physical effects, since the influences of conductor vibrations and internal interference as well as RFI interference are anything but new for the Americans. The special

braiding technique is one of the reasons why one can do without “sound-distorting metal shields”, says Kimber Kable.

A positive side effect of the whole thing: The Kimber Carbon 8, Kimber Carbon 16 and Kimber Carbon Interconnect are hard-wearing, have a comparatively slim design, are pleasantly flexible and can therefore be easily moved behind the rack and loudspeaker. In addition, they come without any optical bling-bling – not many manufacturers dare to do that in this price range – and look trustingly “tooly”. Speaking of which: I deliberately had the Carbon 8 and Carbon 16 speaker cables simply soldered to Kimber-SBAN hollow bananas for this test – an even better alternative in terms of sound would be soldered Kimber-PM cable lugs, which, however, require the plugging in for A / B- Make comparisons more cumbersome. If you want, you can also have wire end sleeves crimped onto the cable ends, which are then subject to a surcharge Chic plugs can be screwed. I myself would always prefer the soldered hollow bananas or cable lugs. With a view to the Kimber Carbon Interconnect, you finally have the choice between XLR plugs from Switchcraft or RCA plugs from WBT.



The Kimber Carbon 8 comes with four insulated conductor strands, each with seven VariStrand copper strands (2,765 euros with soldered hollow bananas or cable lugs with a length of three stereo meters)



The Kimber Carbon 16 has eight insulated strands of conductors, each with seven VariStrand copper strands and is therefore the “thickest” cable in this test (5,390 euros with soldered hollow bananas or cable lugs with a length of three stereo meters)

# SOUND TEST & COMPARISONS: KIMBER CARBON 8, CARBON 16 & CARBON INTERCONNECT

## Sunshine & sweets

Last but not least, for “cable sound skeptics” something fundamental to be clarified in advance: Does the sun rise in the listening room with the Kimber carbon ties between the components? Of course not. Such cables should be used in systems that have long since let the sun shine. This applies twice to the Kimber: First, expensive cables are per se the icing on the cake of audiophile sweets and not their main ingredient. Second, the Kimber Carbon as such are unsuitable for covering up gross system faults – with a few exceptions, perhaps, I will come back to that.

## More expensive = more consistent?



Kimber Carbon Interconnect in XLR design

The carbon strips are all the more suitable for uncovering inadequacies in the existing cabling – or better: to continue scaling well-balanced systems on their chosen path. To briefly recap: My audio and speaker cables that have been used unchanged for many years – especially the Straight Wire Virtuoso (for 2,000 euros, there is now an R2 version) and WSS Platin Line LS4 (for 1,700 euros, which are currently in the online shop I don't like the assembly offered) – are by no means the most expensive and best cables I've ever had. Nevertheless, they have proven themselves so well in many comparison tests that I was never tempted to exchange them. In terms of resolution / analysis in particular, more expensive cables were sometimes used, which, however, was hardly associated with more (subjectively perceived) listening pleasure. On the contrary, it was not uncommon for it to sound even less coherent in my opinion.

## Attention to detail

And the Kimber Carbon are also ahead in terms of resolution. Conveyed via correspondingly high-end systems, one or the other will certainly make a surprisingly clear step here. Such improvements are often associated with tonal trickery – and this is where it gets really interesting for me: Especially with a view to the Kimber Carbon 16 and Carbon Interconnect, it *does not* seem that a more or less pronounced treble boost suggests increased precision. But just the *other way around* for a change. I will briefly explain this again below. Although the sound image is evidently

gaining in precision, openness and tonal presence, nothing seems “artificial”, it even sounds more catchy overall through my Sehring 903 loudspeakers.



Kimber Carbon 16

But let’s stay with the topic of resolution for now, this is where the strengths of the Kimber Carbon 8, Carbon 16 and Carbon Interconnect can be described most easily: For example, using the song “The Velvet Cell” by *Gravenhurst* .

Without the naturalness of the already bell-like voice of the sadly deceased singer Nick Talbot suffering as a side effect (rather the opposite is the case), the fine, sustain-rich cymbal eighth sound even more textured, airier and uncovered in the treble. More (clean) information without any increase in unpleasant hissiness or silveryness: The Kimber Carbon are a high-pitched solution for the ears of everyone who likes it “high-resolution” and at the same time “hardness”.

On the bass side, the strengths of the Kimber Carbon on this track are also easy to identify: The rather prominent mixed electric bass seems less bloated (apart from the Carbon 8, the word “slimmer” would be the wrong word) because it concentrates its pressure more coherently on the Point.



In addition, the bass drum beats differ noticeably better from the bass run: Instead of almost being drowned in the bass mash, the deep beats now rhythmically enrich what is offered with their own accents – more than just a minor matter in this rather cleanly arranged track.

## The real cracker

In my opinion, the real hit is the extreme impulse fidelity of the Kimber Carbon 8, Carbon 16 and Carbon Interconnect. Yes, the Kimber's excellence in this matter symbolizes all of her strengths, which of course are all closely related (!), Perhaps best. Because from the first listen, the noticeably tracking, "unshakable" – yes, the analogy to photography fits absolutely – the reproduction of dynamic jumps automatically increases the spatial focus and the described resolution precision.

The impulse behavior comes to the fore in the first two tracks on *Isis'* 2006 album *In the Absence of Truth* (less "metal" than the other albums of the unfortunately no longer existing combo, tip also for prog rock fans) *Wear* that come up with many densely nested eighth and sixteenth passages of the Toms by drummer Aaron Harris.

Sure, academically you can be happy that the individual tom strokes now seem even easier to "count" ... who still remembers Graf Zahl? But what makes me sit up and take notice, in addition to the feeling that a light fog covering the entire sound image has been withdrawn, is the increased musical conciseness and tension: Logical, when impulses fly noticeably steeper, more precise, more abruptly in the direction of the auricles, increases – without that you have to *think* about sound quality for a moment – inevitably the *emotional on* involvement, the energy load, vulgo: the pick-up factor! To be honest: I have never noticed this with any cable of this quality. Especially since the noticeably increased attack does not affect the sustain and authenticity of timbres.

## Tonally top?



Kimber Carbon 8 (right) and Carbon 16 speaker cables

I had already mentioned above that the Kimber Carbon suggest a tonally fresher sound image in terms of hearing psychology. The outstanding impulse fidelity, or more precisely: the ability of the Kimber to transmit steep-edged signals (characteristics particularly of high frequencies in music, which are created even with bass impulses) with a noticeable degree of accuracy, is a major factor

here. The presumably fresher tonality of the Kimber Carbon is therefore no trick, but feels to me like the natural result of reduced interference. The

The Kimber Carbon 8 loudspeaker cable is an exception: While both the Kimber Carbon 16 and the Kimber Carbon Interconnect with their balanced tonality are suitable for systems that are already tonally coherent, the Carbon 8 tends to be slightly brighter and is more like "Medicine" for chains that one perceives to sound too warm. The different characteristics of the lower layers will probably also regularly tip the scales in the purchase decision "Carbon 8 versus Carbon 16".



### The pure teaching

Tonal differences or not: The fact that the Kimber Carbon is not about high-gloss, impressive sound images, but simply about unimpeded signal transmission, despite the renunciation of pleasant tonality, is underlined by a title such as "Viesca" by *Toundra* once again clear: The splashing of water at the beginning of the song, the plucked, open chords of the western guitar, the drum whisk "solo" and later the wedding with cello, violin and trumpet: the various fingerprints of the respective noises and instruments are traced in such a profiled way – even in the complex situation of the wonderfully anthemic title final this succeeds – that I almost feel a bit disillusioned when I cable back to my work lines. The rippling water, which in its fine dynamic structure and spatially loses its contour, transports me less convincingly into a dripping wet rainy day, the dense arrangement in the title finals loses its multifacetedness and dynamic conciseness,

## CONCLUSION: KIMBER CARBON 8, KIMBER CARBON 16 & KIMBER CARBON INTERCONNECT

Fast, transparent, focused, present – there are many typical hi-fi adjectives to describe the sound of the Kimber Carbon. I used them abundantly over the course of the test. Strictly speaking, of course, cables do not "sound", nevertheless they can audibly manipulate sound by transmitting the signals entrusted to them suboptimally. And in this sense, the Kimber Carbon are among the most undisguised signal transmitters I have ever seen behind racks and boxes. Sure, differences between different loudspeakers or amplifiers – especially in different price ranges – are usually greater than in cable comparisons, but my own test-proven cables have never been so clearly disconnected.



Signed and sealed: the packaging of the Kimber carbon cables

Basically, my own chain with the Kimber Carbon scales across all criteria. Although: Of course, carbon binders do not bring more smoothness and romance into the listening room – on the contrary, they do not want to serve as concealing cosmetics. I would also use the Kimber Carbon 8 in systems that are too warm, the Kimber Carbon 16 and the Kimber Carbon Interconnect also ensure more involvement in *balanced*, high-quality systems. There is a developer who is not entirely unknown in the scene and who, even if he has nothing to do with Kimber, would definitely sum it up like this: “More live!”



**Facts:**

**Kimber Kable Carbon Interconnect:** two VariStrand copper strands, connectors from Switchcraft or WBT, Cinch or XLR from 833 euros for 0.5 stereo meters each, additional lengths at an additional cost

**Kimber Cable Carbon 8:** four VariStrand copper strands, 2,765 euros with soldered hollow bananas or cable lugs with a length of three stereo meters, additional lengths and WBT plugs for an extra charge

**Kimber Cable Carbon 16:** eight VariStrand copper strands, 5,390 euros with soldered hollow bananas or cable lugs with a length of three stereo meters, additional lengths and WBT plugs for an extra charge