

Minitest

Making the 'right connection' is paramount to good audio. **Richard Black** tests 'serious' options

Furutech Alpha-Line Plus

PRICE: £210 CONTACT: 01276 501392
WEBSITE: FURUTECH.COM

FURUTECH WAS ONE OF THE FIRST COMPANIES to espouse 'Ohno Continuous Casting' (OCC) copper, which has exceptionally long crystals and, therefore, fewer crystal boundaries than normal electrical-grade copper. In addition, particular care is paid to the copper after it has been turned into wire, including cryogenic treatment and demagnetisation. While the final benefits are open to question, it does demonstrably improve (minutely) the conductivity of copper. The latter is more arguable, though, since copper is not remotely magnetic in the first place and at the level of purity of the PC-OCC copper used here, it's hard to imagine what magnetic impurities could be contributing. Construction is pseudo-balanced, with two conductors under a common screen; dielectric loss is a little high, however, due to the cotton filler used between the polythene-insulated cores.

We found this a relatively characterful cable, with a hint of subjective bass lift and a very slightly restrained, but nonetheless tuneful and informative, treble. None of that is a problem, but we were slightly concerned by a small degree of laziness in rhythmic material (this can sometimes be a problem with slightly bassy sound). Detail is good, though, and we enjoyed the imaging, which has some very nice depth to it.

VERDICT SLIGHTLY BASS-RICH balance has its appeal, but there seems to be some sacrifice in rhythmic precision. Images have unusually good depth



Kimber Hero

PRICE: £180 CONTACT: 08453 451550
WEBSITE: KIMBER.COM



A RELATIVELY NEW ADDITION to Kimber's range, Hero employs some familiar Kimber features, including the famous woven construction, although unlike some older cables this one is 'Gyro-Quadratic', with four conductors instead of three. They're concealed beneath a nylon braid, making up a cable that is moderately springy but easy to handle. The basic termination is Kimber's own 'Ultraplate' phono plugs, which are simple but well made. For a slightly eyebrow-raising premium of £197 you can have WBT phonos, while a balanced version with XLR connectors is also available. As usual for Kimber, conductors are made of 'hyper-pure' copper, stranded with differing thicknesses of wire and insulated in fluorocarbon materials.

This cable stands to make a very good initial impression. There's an almost tangible snap to strongly rhythmic music and anything with a drum kit in it, for instance, fares very well. Just occasionally, with sources like a classical symphony orchestra, we felt that the lowest bass may be a touch on the light side, but otherwise it is very well-balanced with the rest of the band and has both precision and tuning nicely mastered. Up in the treble there's plenty of sparkle and while it may not be as overt as some, it's all there for the hearing with a minimum of listener effort. Imaging is extended and stable.

VERDICT ENERGY AND RHYTHMIC drive are the key features here, but there is also plenty to admire in terms of detail, while tonal balance is excellent



Oyaide Across 750

PRICE: £204 CONTACT: 01332 342233
WEBSITE: OYAIDE.COM

OYAIDE HAILS FROM JAPAN and is distributed in the UK by Black Rhodium. It makes much of the technologies it has applied to improve electrical conduction between metal surfaces in contact and while, as so often in audio, the precise benefits are hard to quantify, it makes interesting reading.

This cable is on the face of it a simple design, similar to semi-airspaced 75-ohm aerial downlead, but it includes several distinguishing features, including a rather ingenious design of insulator, which is intended to damp mechanical vibrations rapidly. The copper used is PC-OCC (supplied by Furukawa) and both core and screen are stranded. It is terminated in Rhodium-plated plugs.

We found ourselves a little perplexed by this cable. It has a good basic performance with no obvious flaws in terms of detail, tonality or impact and yet we never quite clicked with it. Trying it in various applications between various makes of source and amplification components didn't change that significantly. In the end, we felt that it is just a touch shy in terms of the finest detail and as a result requires that little bit more effort from the listener to keep fully in touch with the music. Otherwise the sound is very pleasing, with particularly well-integrated bass that lacks nothing in terms of weight. Treble is well-extended, but can sometimes seem a little dry, a common companion to a slight lack of detail.

VERDICT ★★★★★ **DESPITE GOOD BASS and energetic presentation, this cable seems to lack the last work in detail and as a result doesn't quite convince overall**



van den Hul The River

PRICE: £175 (0.8M) CONTACT: 01235 511166
WEBSITE: VANDENHUL.COM



Never a company to stand still, van den Hul has added a whole new range of cables to its catalogue, based around the '3T' or True Transmission Technology. If you've ever taken an interest in the company's cables, you'll know that they often feature non-metallic conductors, which Mr van den Hul reckons sound better than metal ones despite their lower conductivity. As a close second best, he claims, one can more practically use a mixture of carbon fibre and metal conductors and 3T does just that. The metal is an amorphous alloy, the point about amorphous metals being that they don't have normal crystal boundaries. The cable is assembled as coaxial design, with the 3T technology in the central core, while the screen is made of silver-plated copper. As usual it's jacketed overall in 'Hulliflex', which is a halogen-free, rubbery material, coloured in this case a rather fetching light blue.

We're always loath to ascribe aspects of sound quality to a single facet of a design, but the fact is that this, our first 3T cable, made a particularly strong impression on us from the outset, producing a sound that's astonishingly rich in little details, but at the same time delightfully well-integrated so that the overall picture is never lost or subdued. Tonal balance is excellent and bass very cleanly extended. Rhythm can seem a little restrained at times, but one's foot soon gets tapping nevertheless. ●

VERDICT ★★★★★ **A VERY WELL-ROUNDED cable that's particularly strong on detail without compromising other areas of performance**



Naturally, cable manufacturers would like you to use their brand of products throughout your system. To the extent that cable characteristics are surprisingly consistent between

applications, that makes some sense, but if you have a typical audiophile's system it may not be the ideal answer. It's certainly possible to overdo the business of trying to 'tune' a system

using cables, but there remains much to be said for matching each cable to its particular application. With many dealers offering 'try it at home' schemes, this needn't be a risky path to follow.