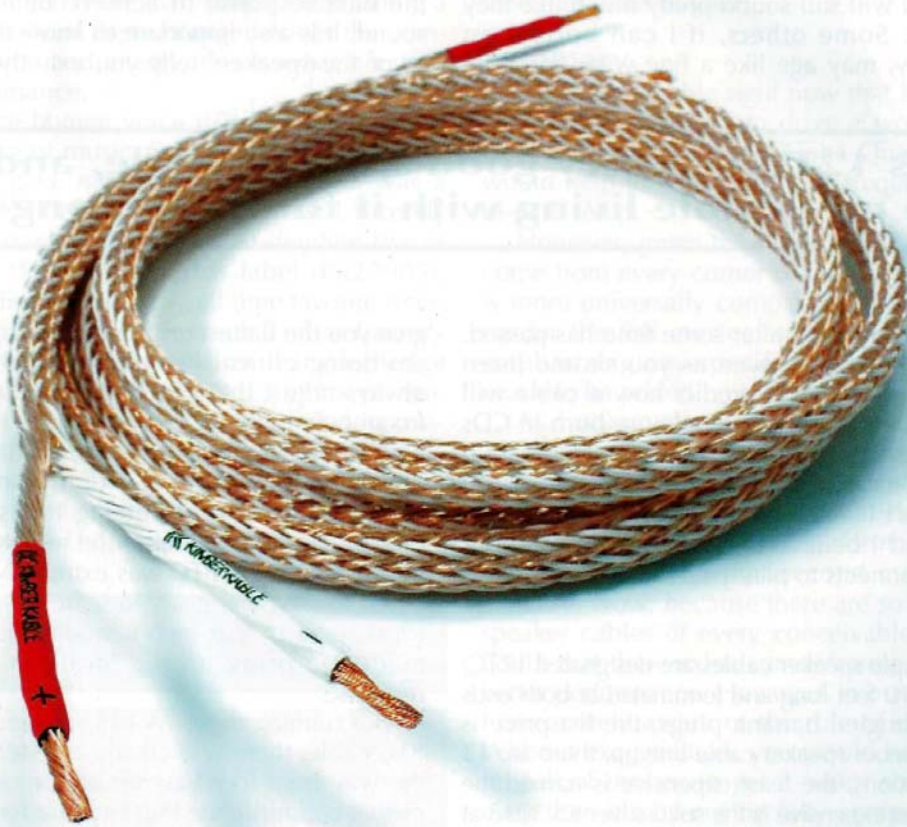


Kimber Kable 12TC Speaker Cable

Ron Nagle



IT SEEMS LIKE every time I look at a high-end audio magazine, there is a picture of Kimber Kable's latest and greatest speaker cable, the 12TC. This has to be some sort of coincidence, but that's how it seems. Perhaps you're like me, looking for the perfect set of speaker cables.

I purchased a 10-foot pair of Kimber's 8TC speaker cables at a show two years ago, and I have never regretted it. As a matter of fact, I recall that one of the big corporate audio magazines did a cable survey and the bottom line bang for the buck winner was the Kimber 8TC. I guess right now I own about six pairs of speaker cables. Two of them look like garden hoses and are heavy enough to detach just by virtue of their weight.

I remember reading a white paper from a wire maker that said, in brief, that at certain specific audio frequencies, the majority of electrons would be carried near the surface of the wire. It went into great detail, presenting mathematical formulas, describing how the surface transmission area could be expressed as a quantity relative to the core at the important frequencies. This techno-blurb was used to support the manufacturer's use of a very specific diameter of wire which turned out to be very thin. By the way, I have heard good sound piped through some very small gauge wiring, and it also

seems to me that there are an amazing variety of cable designs on the market.

So what must a manufacturer do to make really fine sounding audio cables? Many electrical engineers say it is impossible to predict what a cable will sound like just by measuring the resistance or inductance or capacitance of a multi-stranded cable or even a single piece of wire. One must, they say, consider the insulation material, the spacing between wires, how many strands of wire are used, the specific metallic composition of the wire, the wire's aggregate gauge, the arrangement of the wires (Litz, rope twist, braided, or maybe in a plain-Jane parallel configuration), etc.

I have come to believe that so many complex elements of construction come into play that cable design must be considered an art form. However, in spite of these complexities, there are some very good sounding audio cables. So some of these wizards of wire magic are getting the job done.

TAV

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Audio cables can to some extent act as filters on the signals that are passed through them. That situation will continue until the perfect electrical conductor is found. Until that day comes, there are two important considerations which will captivate high-end audio enthusiasts.

The first is system matching which is the idea that to extract the best performance from one's components and speakers, one must use a particular speaker wire. The second is the audiophile's perennial effort to get the most performance for his money. Some cables can be in use for a year and will still sound pretty much like they did on day one. Some others, if I can borrow an oenophile analogy, may age like a fine wine and only

When I began this report, my reference system consisted of four-way AV123 Strata Mini-speakers which were driven by my Sanders ESL power amplifier. My previous speaker cables were a pair of Synergistic Research Alpha Quad X Series cables with active shielding. I had been using these cables because they seemed to open up the high frequencies and add a little more tweet to my tweeters.

Now there is something you should know about Mark Shifter's Strata Mini speakers. They have a built-in 350-watt bass amplifier which makes it easier to adjust the bass response to achieve balance of the overall sound. It is also important to know that the manufacturer of the speakers tells you exactly what settings will

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mature to best performance after some time has passed. And, indeed, a few change even as you sit and listen through them; you can never predict how a cable will change. And, yes, I know some people use burn-in CDs (I have some of them) or signal generators to break in cables. These items could well speed up the whole process, but I don't like to listen to burn-in CDs or signal generators and I believe that you should use your cables and interconnects to play your favorite music.

The Subject

The review sample speaker cables are designated 12TC; the review pair is 10 feet long and terminated at both ends with WBT-0645 angled banana plugs, the list price is \$978.00. In the Kimber speaker cable line up, there are 13 different configurations; the least expensive is named the 4PR, while the most expensive is the solid-silver KS 3038 at \$13,860. If you list them by price, the 12TC falls neatly in the middle in seventh place. The choice of speaker cable termination does effect the final price; when most audiophiles order speaker cables and interconnects, they specify custom terminations. As knowledgeable audiophiles know, the Kimber Company is the U.S. distributor for the German-made WBT connectors. The firm basically offers two types of speaker cable terminations, spade and banana. The Kimber Company offers four types of spade connectors: the economy-level SPD, the Postmaster, the WBT0660 ¼ inch, and the WBT0680 5/16 inch. Similarly, there are four levels of banana plug terminations. Starting with the least expensive version, there is the SBAN, WBT-0644, WBT-0645, and the WBT-0600. As for the interconnects, the choices span eight style and price levels. Suffice it to say, my Silver Streak sample was terminated with WBT-0108 RCA plugs.

Maybe not so obviously, the 8TC and the 12TC designations tell you the wire is Teflon insulation over *Hyper Pure Copper* wire. The number designation indicates there are eight *Varistrands* in the 8TC and 12 *Varistrands* grouped together in each separate 12TC wire. These wires are then braided. In addition, there are two colors of Teflon wire insulation used in the construction, white and clear. These *Hyper Pure Copper Varistrand* wires are then formed into a braided rope configuration, and the aggregate thickness of all the wires is equal to a seven-gauge conductor.

give you the flattest response broadband. And so when I am doing critical listening through these speakers, I always adjust them for flat response as well as broad frequency response.

First, I replaced the Synergistic Research speaker cables with the Kimber 8TC. I wanted to establish a baseline by using something I was familiar with and then later compare that to the new Kimber Kable 12TC. In a nutshell, the 8TC was extremely evenhanded compared to the Synergistic Research Alpha Quad X Series. I lost some of that high-frequency energy that formerly made me bring up the Strata Mini speaker's bass response.

But running these AV123 speakers flat and using the 8TC cable, there was clearly a better overall balance all the way from low bass up and into the treble frequencies. It was fortunate that I still had my Moscode 402AU in house. This hybrid Class-A tube and Mosfet amplifier by George Kaye was able to extract a bit more warmth and life from the 8TC; these speaker cables never sounded better.

Let me give you a hint of my overall conclusion. I can tell you that right from the start, the Kimber 12TC speaker cables changed very little from their initial presentation to final coda. Graceful and gentlemanly, they always gave me a smooth and well-balanced overall presentation.

Kimber's 12TC provided a not-at-all subtle leap in performance; indeed, it was like the 8TC on steroids. With the volume held at a constant level, there was an apparent increase in bass while the better treble extension opened my eyes wide because this is exactly what I needed.

I was very near to completing my assessment of the Kimber 12TC when I received a pair of Kimber Silver Streak interconnects. These were three meters in length and consisted of three Teflon-insulated wires, two black and one clear in a braided rope. The silver positive conductor has clear insulation, while the two copper wires with black insulation are the negative side. I installed them between my Audio Research SP9 Mark 3 preamplifier and the Moscode 402AU amplifier. These \$992.00 interconnects gave me increased treble extension and better outlined the sound stage dimensions.

Performance

Not long ago I bought a used CD, Paul Simon's *Graceland* (Warner 9-25447-2). My two favorite tracks are numbers 5 and 6, "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes" and "You Can Call Me Al." At four minutes into "Diamonds...", you can hear the accompanying men of Ladysmith Black Mambazo as a deep background rumble, growing louder underneath a complex layering way back in the center image. I love the way the electric bass lines of these two songs threads the music and the arrangement together into a coherent compositions. What happens is much more than simply establishing a bass tempo. The body of the midrange imbues the composition with vitality and energy; this is what breathes life into the performance.

For me, it is the human voice that best conveys the emotional meaning of music. Somewhere at one of the shows, someone gave me a demo disc which was a compilation of 14 different female vocalists. I recently found it under a stack of CDs, *Best Audiophile Voices Selection* on the Premium Records label (PR27905). Included on this disc is one of my all time favorite reference recordings. It is the CD's track 7, *Eva Cassidy* singing "Fields of Gold". You may know that she died of a melanoma November 2, 1996 at 33 years of age. Could anything be more tragic? Her life ended in relative obscurity. But two years later, her "Fields of Gold" recording was played in the UK on popular music radio station BBC-2. It climbed to number 1 on the music charts and eventually reached something like

"Platinum" status. Not long after this success, the British public fell in love with her version of "Over The Rainbow" and it went "Triple Platinum" in UK sales. One can still find volumes of information about Eva Cassidy in newspaper articles and there was even a British television retrospective of her life recently. To quote Sting, "I have rarely heard a voice of such purity, I was almost in tears." It's hard to describe the depth of human emotion she can weave into her phrases. Her eloquence is heart-stopping. Listening to her breathy plaintive vision, I really can imagine her walking somewhere in fields of gold.

Summary

I do own a cable right now that I would use in a bi-wired speaker set up to drive a woofer or subwoofer. And as I said earlier my Alpha Quad X speaker cables would help to highlight treble frequencies in that same bi-wire setup.

However, given the multitude of speaker cables that come from every corner of the globe, the Kimber 12TC is more universally compatible. Its wonderful ability to render the full musical spectrum without favoring or emphasizing any specific area is highly unusual and much to be prized.

As I commented earlier about Kimber's 8TC, the 12TC is extremely evenhanded from top to bottom. But because it has much greater extension than the 8TC, the 12TC will dig deeper down into the bass and extend much farther to reveal treble information.

But let's turn to that second major consideration, expense. Now, because there are so many thousands of speaker cables of every conceivable design, I have no doubt that there exists somewhere a speaker cable with better performance. However, in our audiophile pursuit, I am acutely aware of the rule of diminishing returns. Without exaggeration, you would need to spend a barrel full of money to get a better sounding cable. And even then it may not be fully compatible and optimize the rest of your system. And we have not yet started to compensate you, dear reader and fellow audiophile, for the time and effort of your search.

Thus, in my estimation, I have fairly described the two main considerations on which you should base your decision. Kimber's 12TC comes very close to being that near-perfect or universal cable that would never be the weakest link in any system irrespective of that system's cost.

Should you keep on looking for that perfect set of cables? Well, I guess that's part of our audiophile hobby but just between me and you, I'm getting extremely tired of the chase. I think I will pause here, put my feet up and just listen for a while. Kimber's 12TC is a very good sounding cable and I would have no problem living with it for a very long time. Semper Hi-Fi.

NOTES

Kimber Kable 12TC speaker cable, 10 feet with 8 WBT 0645 banana plugs, \$978.00; **Kimber Kable Silver Streak** unbalanced three-meter interconnects, \$992.00. Kimber Kable, 2752 South 1900 West, Ogden, UT 84401; website kimber.com has sales and tech support e-mail addresses; phone 801/621-5530; fax 801/627-6980.

Associated Equipment

Marantz DV 8400 Universal CD player Cambridge Audio Discmagic-1 CD transport; Cambridge S-700 Isomagic HDCD D/A Converter; ART DI/O Up-Sampling D/A and A/D processor; Magnum Dynalab FT 101a tuner with Dynalab Signal Sleuth; Moscode 402AU power amplifier; AV123 Onix Rocket Strata Mini-speakers; Synergistic Research Alpha Quad X Series speaker cables with active shielding; Kimber 8TC and 12TC speaker cables; Kimber Silver Streak interconnects; Nordost Red Dawn interconnects; Wire World Eclipse-2 speaker cables; Chord Silver Siren interconnects; Wire World IEC power cord; Audiobahn digital interconnect; Richard Gray Substation; Islatrol Industrial A.C. line conditioner; Alpha-Core Balanced Transformer Power Supply; Audio Power PE-1 power enhancer; Triad isolation transformer; VPI Magic Bricks; Argent Room Lens system, and Room Tunes Panels.

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