

KIMBER KABLE SELECT USB CABLES

There really is no point, as I will readily admit to having done previously, in mentioning standard computer style USB leads alongside ‘audiophile’ style Kimber and other specialist audio USB cables. I recognize that at one level they do indeed merit comparison yet given all other considerations it is like comparing chalk and cheese, as they are designed to perform completely different tasks.



If all you want to do is transfer photos or similar “static files” from a computer to, say, a printer or an external HDD, there is no question that you should simply choose a cheap and cheerful computer style lead. A \$10,000 or whatever cost, bespoke lead will be of no benefit here. If on the other hand you want to handle time-sensitive music files to enjoy through a high-end audio system, then buy the best ‘custom’ leads you can afford.

Kimber has several varieties available including its quite lavishly packaged Select models. I received three of these to try including the least costly KS2416 CU, which employs Copper conductors and costs £382.50 for a terminated one-metre length.

The cable is not flashy to look at but is probably most distinguished by its bespoke, prosaic looking connectors. The cable itself is hand assembled; Kimber feels that machine assembly and mass production does not provide adequate musical performance and cannot match the quality of artisan-build.

I tested the cable between my desktop computer and the USB input of an Arcam rDAC. This might not be the most revealing or musically communicative DAC known to man but there is a great many of them in the field and you are likely to be familiar with the sound of this popular device.

The KS2416CU has a pleasantly open and revealing sound: not one that is aggressively detailed or tonally bright but one that certainly allows you to hear subtleties in the music. It accurately brought out the distinctive squeal of the pinch harmonics in John 5's “*Black Widow Of La Porte*” on his humbucker-equipped – so richer sounding than usual – Fender Telecaster. It was equally forthcoming with the breath-takingly sensitive vocals of London Grammar's Hannah Reid and the carefully considered accompaniment behind her.

The cable certainly also handled timing information well: it breezed through the “Intro” to Lou Reed’s *“Rock’n’Roll Animal”* album and enthusiastically tracked Fernando Saunders’ jaunty bass playing all the way into the thoroughly upbeat rendition of *“Heroin”*. The cable also possesses a natural dynamic compass: it is not over dramatic, ‘obvious’ or shouty; rather it has a controlled but expansive degree of expression that lends it a believable, natural sounding character.

As the least expensive of this trio – even though it is hardly a budget offering – one has to say that the Kimber KS2416CU is a definite step up from any run-of-the-mill USB cable you might be using to link a computer and a USB DAC. Its performance will definitely see off that of any lead purchased from a computer store! Note that it does not come fitted with silly ferrite rings to drag its performance down!

The next cable to audition is the one-metre long, top-of-the-range, Silver conductor KS2436AG, which retails for around £907.00, a not inconsequential sum. Switching from the CU to the AG specification cable gives an immediate sense of increased detail and enhanced high frequency response, which seems to be particularly outstanding on voices, and brings a vivid and worthwhile clarity and expression to their portrayal.

The cable also exhibits great speed and dynamics especially when you are listening to a guitarist with the improvisational capabilities of John McLaughlin play, especially playing live when he is at his most spontaneous.. The cable also demonstrated its revelatory capability on a film in which Jeff Beck discusses and demonstrates the qualities of his favourite guitars, the tonal qualities and note shape abilities of each are revealed and articulated with great expression and distinction by the KS2436AG.

I would suggest only considering the AG lead if you have a top grade DAC. Something in the range of a Cambridge Audio DACmagic or an Arcam rDAC probably isn’t going to be sufficiently revealing to justify the expense of this cable. If, however, you have an M2-Tech Young or a Naim DAC-V1, then jump right in...

The final cable to be auditioned is the KS2426HB, which, retailing at £612.90, sits slap in the middle position of the trio presented here for test. The two-letter code at the end of its designation informs you that its construction is hybrid, in this case mixing copper and silver in its conductor line-up. Like the others in the Select range the cable features Custom Type A and Type B USB plugs, has VariStrand power conductors, uses braided geometry and dual layer frequency optimized shielding. Again, like its stablemates, the cable is also deep cryogenically treated.

As you might expect, the KS2426HB seems to blend the finest qualities of the CU and AG cables. The hybrid displays a very natural, unforced balance with no portion of the frequency spectrum making itself noticeable or prominent above the rest. There is, it seems, a place for everything and everything appears to be in that place. The HB sounds as though it is keeping a relentless grip on the signal and making sure that a laudable sense of order and control prevails throughout its presentation. As a result it is hard to focus on the sound as one’s attention is shifted very firmly to the music or other content.

In the context of the simple system in which these cables were tested – a 64-bit Windows 7 Desktop, Arcam rDAC, Cambridge Audio Minx Xi, and NEAT Iota loudspeakers – I have to say that the KS2426HB would probably be the cable out of this group that I would buy. The system tends to focus on enjoying music rather than hi-fi niceties and the similarly aligned approach of the cable seems wholly complementary. So, if you are looking for a ‘winner’ look no further than the Kimber Select KS2426HB.