

FURUTECH

AV Guide USA – Chris Martens
GT2 USB Cable Review
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Furutech USB products at CEDIA 2009 (from L to R): LeMans USB DAC/integrated/headphone amp, GT40 USB DAC/phonostage, and GT2 USB cables (in blue) & GT3 USB cables (in purple)

I've recently received my review sample of Furutech's new GT2 audiophile-grade USB cable, and have begun trying them out with various USB DAC (or USB DAC-equipped) components that I have on hand. The question on my mind, and perhaps yours too, is whether high-end USB cables actually make positive differences in the sounds we hear from our USB DACs—and, if so, what kinds of differences? Before I tackle that question, though, a bit of background is in order.

Background/Construction Details

Furutech's GT2 USB cables feature silver-plated conductors made of cryogenically treated, high-purity, OCC-process (Ohno Continuous Casting) copper, with insulators made of a "special-grade, high-density polyethylene." According to Furutech, the cables feature "3-layer shield construction for improved noise isolation." Topping things off, Furutech provides its own very high-quality 24k gold-plated USB connectors.

The GT2 models feature USB 2.0 connectors, while an even more ambitious cable, the GT3, has also been released to address upcoming USB 3.0 applications.

What Kinds of USB Problems Are We Trying To Solve?

My opinion: At first listen, digital audio delivered via USB sounds pretty promising. Unlike some of my colleagues at *The Absolute Sound*, I found that USB offers very good timing and rhythmic definition, and very stable imaging through the midrange. However, one area where I did notice significant problems involved transient information—especially on hard, sharp transients—in the upper midrange and treble regions. I found that USB could handle sustained upper midrange and treble information reasonably well, but that on transients the sound tended to become overly hard, edgy, and in some cases splashy and diffuse—basically undermining the sense of effortless clarity I was hoping for. In the process, a certain amount of very delicate, high harmonic information also tended to get lost through USB.

And The Answer Is...

Given the observations I've outlined above, I wanted to find out what the impact, if any, of the Furutech GT2 cables would be. I'm pleased to report that they do make an audible difference—one that directly helps mitigate the problems I mentioned (though it does not necessarily eliminate them completely).

First, I found the GT2 help minimize background noise and hash—something you (or at least I) tend to perceive not so much as a “heightened sense of quietude,” but rather as “more low-level sonic information becoming discernible.”

Second, I found that the GT2s went right after those spitty, edgy, splashy upper midrange and treble transients that had been bothering me. While my initial listening tests lead me to think these cables, while very good, probably do not enable USB interface to sound as good as competing S/PDIF interfaces, though they certainly help narrow the gap considerably. But the key point is this: with a good USB cable in play, digital audio via USB can become a highly listenable and enjoyable alternative (even if can not yet claim—in an absolute sense—to scale true “state-of-the-art” heights).

I find these results very encouraging, since they suggest to me that USB has more performance potential that some have thought—potential that good USB cables such as the Furutech GT2 can help us tap in the here and now.

<http://www.avguide.com/blog/first-listen-furutech-gt2-audiophile-grade-usb-cables>