

# FURUTECH

HiFizine.com (USA)

La Source 101 headshell leads review

## HIFI ZINE

The enthusiast's audio webzine

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### SMALL THINGS MATTER: FURUTECH'S LA SOURCE 101 HEADSHELL LEADS

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Setting up a turntable is not always the simplest of tasks... A quick perusal of any audio forum will supply all the evidence you need of the obsessiveness of some audiophiles when it comes to extracting the last ounce of performance from their analog rigs. It's not enough to make a choice of table, arm, cartridge or cable. Vinyl lovers know that set-up makes all the difference and small changes can have huge sonic impact. Well, if your table allows for it, let me add one more variable to consider: the headshell leads that provide the first link from your cartridge to your phono stage. In particular, let me report on the very positive experience I've enjoyed over the last month with the Furutech La Source 101 headshell leads on my SME V.

It is easy to overlook these small leads when contemplating cartridge upgrades or HTA settings, and I have been as guilty as the next audiophile in this regard. Even when I discovered that the SME V comes with pin connectors at the cartridge end of the arm which allow for swapping leads (you just have to take a leap of faith and pull firmly on these to remove them, thereby exposing the underlying pins), I assumed the stock SME wire, given it's short length and robust form, was likely to be as good as I could use in that space. I'd even eschewed replacement leads that came free with some cartridge purchases (a nice touch with the high value Dynavector 10X5 I bought a couple of years back). I mean, what could an inch of wire really do?



Now part of my conservatism here is, in all honesty, a function of trepidation as much as disinterest. Cartridge fitting requires steady hands, good light and the patience of a saint. Yes, it gets easier with practice, but few of us get sufficient practice for it to become a routine skill. Rather, each fitting involves unique finger contortions, neck strain, spectacle adjustments and some muttered cursing – at least in my house. Why add another step? Well, curiosity tends to get the better of most audiophiles eventually, so when Scot Markwell of [Elite Audio Video](#), the Furutech distributor here in the US, offered me the leads for evaluation at the end of my time with the excellent Furutech Silver Arrow phono cable ([reviewed here](#)), how could I refuse?

The La Source 101s are four short (43mm) 26AWG teflon-coated silver strand wires with phosphor bronze connectors. They are somewhat stiff and require a little bit of work to fit into the confined space of the SME V headshell with the cartridge fitted, so you need to curl them appropriately to ensure neat dressing. In addition, the pins on the arm side of the SME are thinner than standard cartridge pins, so if you want to secure the leads in place, you will need to crimp their connectors on with appropriate tool or they will slide off with the slightest movement.

At first, since I did not want to mark a review set, I just placed them on the pins carefully. You can do this but let me tell you, trying to place these wires appropriately and securely on the correct colored pin (which even more frustratingly on the SME V are not actually color coded, you have to look it up in the manual) while simultaneously screwing in a cartridge, is an exercise that could pave your path to madness. You know that kind of puzzle assembly where you just have everything lined up, have only one piece left to place, when the whole house of cards collapses? Well, placing four loose leads correctly in that space had me at the point of exasperation on several occasions across a couple of cartridge fittings, not least since I wanted to compare each fitted with the Furutech and the stock leads. In the end, I just bit the bullet and pulled out the needle nose pliers.

The trick here is not to squeeze the connector onto the pin, even if you can get your pliers or tweezers into that tight space in the headshell. Far better to 'pre-squeeze' the lead connector with it fitted on a compliant material like a toothpick (see, sometimes there is useful info on those audio forums). I used the tapered end of some disposable wooden serving sticks to allow me to pinch the thin metal ends slightly without risking them collapsing into themselves under pressure. A small squeeze was sufficient to reduce the circumference to the point where each connector fit snugly on the tonearm pin and stayed there, allowing me to let go while I proceeded to connect the cartridge as normal. As always, proceed slowly, deliberately and carefully when dealing with these types of cables.

One immediate surprise, and that was before I even played a record, was the need to adjust the counterweight, and not slightly. The Furutech La Source leads were obviously heavier than the stock cables and in an arm as finely tuned as the SME V, the slightest change in weight required a few adjustment turns of the V's rear wheel to float the arm prior to tracking force being set.

Effort aside, this change has to be one of the most obvious improvements I've made in years. Across three cartridges (Clearaudio Concerto II, Dynavector 10X5, and Sumiko Pearwood Celebration II), the La Source 101 leads brought obvious improvements in all areas of reproduction. There is little point deconstructing the results, as everything just sounded clearer and better resolved. For example, I heard dual guitar lines on Tommy Bolin's 'You Told Me That You Loved Me' clearly for the first time. Gerry Rafferty's vocals were better separated from the backing singers on 'It's Gonna Be a Long Night', and the bass on the wonderful MusicMatters Blue Note reissue of Kenny Burrell's *Midnight Blue* was

clearer across every track. At first I thought that perhaps just removing the old SME leads might have had the effect of cleaning the pin connection; but going back to the old leads confirmed that it was the Furutechs that brought the improvement, not a fresh pin connection. Much as the Furutech Silver Arrow tonearm cable seemed to give my vinyl rig a sonic kick in the pants, the headshell leads enlivened everything across the board. This is the sort of improvement you hear and just never want to give up. At \$350 for a set of 4 from [The Music.Com](http://www.TheMusic.Com), this is better value than any cartridge upgrade of the same price that I can imagine. Further proof that in the analog domain, small changes really do matter. Unhesitatingly recommended.

## **Equipment under review**

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*Furutech's La Source 101 headshell leads*

Manufacturer website: <http://www.furutech.com/>

Product page: <http://www.furutech.com/2013/02/02/1635/>

Retail price: \$350 (USD)

## **Associated Equipment**

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Vinyl: SME 20/2 with SME V arm, and Clearaudio Concerto II cartridge

Phono stage: Whest P.03RDT

Preamp: SMCaudio VRE-1,

Power amps: Spectron Musician III Mk2 monoblocks

Cables: Harmonic Technology phono and interconnects, High Fidelity interconnects, Von Schweikert biwires for speakers

Power cords: Spectron Thunderbolts, Absolute Fidelity, Wywires.

Speakers: Von Schweikert VR5 Anniversary IIs

Conditioning by Audience and PS Audio (main components).

<http://www.hifizine.com/2015/01/small-things-matter-furutechs-la-source-101-headshell-leads/>