

FURUTECH

Review

High Fidelity

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HIGH **Fidelity**

TESTS TESTS

INTERCONNECT RCA + LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

FURUTECH REFERENCE III SERIES AUDIO REFERENCE III-NI + SPEAKER REFERENCE III

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Things related to cable are a bit "shaggy". This is an element of the audio path, that depends most on the associated equipment, maybe only the power elements are even more depending. This causes the need to verify the findings in my system in other systems, preferably completely different. One can argue to what extent the cables influence the sound, but one thing cannot be

denied: it has influence, always and everywhere. An open question is if the changes justify the cost. Because good cables are mostly expensive. Sometimes absurdly expensive. But if you have dealt with a top system, there is a big chance, that you experienced, how small changes in cabling change the sound in a way, that it “does not sound” with anything after that. Many time those small changes are able to ruin the sound or put it on an orbit, seemingly unreachable. Because the choice of cabling is the final touch, something like a blessing for the system we’ve put together. That is the reason to be aware of the fact, that this is something we should address in the end, not in the beginning, but it cannot be omitted. Unfortunately. Especially for our bank account.



This is not the first contact with the brand [Furutech](#) in HFOL, because we have tested the power strip [E-TP80E](#), and the reference digital AES/EBU cable (test [HERE](#)), that is in my opinion one of the absolute top connectors of that kind. At least I have not heard anything better than that to date. The tested cables, like the mentioned digital one, are from the Reference series. As usual, their looks do not justify their price. But if we place them next to the [Velum](#), that I use, then it is visible, that their workmanship is way better: extremely thorough, professional and this is no garage production, like in the case of the first ones. The interconnect and the speaker cable are not stiff and can be easily shaped when connecting. They are protected by sleeves – the interconnect by a black one, the speaker cable by a brown one. Near one of the ends (the cable has no marked directionality) an aluminum cable box is placed with the insides protected by resin. To not to damage it, it is covered with green satin with a golden writing Reference Series on it. Special attention must be paid to the plugs – those are phenomenal and connect with the sockets even better than [WBT](#). The pleasure coming from using them was even greater, as I upgraded my CD player [Lektor Prime](#) (this is the asset of [Ancient Audio](#) gear – that the device can be updated at every step forwards) including the exchange of the RCA and IEC sockets for Furutech products. Because with so refined products a suitable reference point is required, the cables were compared to the best I had available: [Velum](#), [Cardas](#) Golden Reference, [XLO](#) Limited (test of the interconnect LE-1 [HERE](#)) and the [Tara Labs](#) ISM The 0.8 + Omega (test of the interconnect ISM The 0.8 [HERE](#)).

SOUND



The Furutech cables are part of the small group of connectors, that do nothing wrong and clearly want to stay in the background. They are of course not devoted from character, because everything in this world leaves its imprint, but here it does not come to front. So it might seem that we have the ideal cable here – something everybody desires, who wants to connect two devices together or a device with speakers as if there would be nothing connecting. In that case it would be the end of the senseless (in reality) struggle between cable X and Y, between choosing the lesser evil (rotten compromise) and betting on one concrete (common compromise). It is not like that. This is not a fault of Furutech or those particular cables, but physics. Physics is the reason that there will always be something missing.

But let me start over: Furutech cables are very fair (in an absolutely positive way) and absolutely credible. They have two characteristics that allow setting them up against other cables: strong bass and silky treble. I will start with the first one. The Japanese connectors, both of them, sound with a fleshy, dynamic bottom. With every disc. With this they are not one-dimensional and just drone, but nicely show the character of the sound source. On the lately acquired disc of Charlie Haden and Antonio Forcione *Heartplay* (Naim, CD098, CD), actually a very nice disc, we have only a guitar and a contrabass. The instruments were recorded in a way typical for Naim, a purist, two AKG microphone setup, placed away from the instruments. This results in a splendid, credible space, also the relations between the instruments are well defined. The contrabass, this would seem based on the circular characteristic of the low frequencies, should be audible in both channels. It is true in some way – sustain is rather a smear than a spot. But we are informed about the place where the musician is by details like: hitting the string by the player, the strings hitting the instrument, etc. The better the system, the better this can be “seen”, and from some moment the more natural are those relationships. The same thing relates to the cables. Furutech, similar to other best cables, has those “hurdles” behind it. The contrabass is slightly to the left, it has a very precise signature, it can be heard that it is recorded in some space, etc. On the other side of the “rainbow” is the bass guitar on the newest disc from Radiohead *In Rainbows* (XL Records, XLCD 324, CD). This is a modern, clean recording with a big amount of adrenaline and emotion. Also here, when the bass enters, like in the 3rd piece, we have a clear situation as to its timbre, tone, place on stage, etc. There is a splendid attack and reverb. The truth with the bass spreads also to other instruments, with drums and percussion in the lead. Every kind of playing is presented as it should be – whether it is Depeche Mode from *Violator*, or from *Courage* Pauli Cole (Decca, B0008292-02, CD) – every time we have short kicks with rhythm and similar. When on the new (fantastic!!!) disc of Jack Johnson *Sleep Through The Static* (Brushfire Records, 756005, CD) bass does sometimes spill, we hear that this is the recording’s fault and not the system’s or cables’. It is not about clear signals that “this is not us” but we just know that.



The top part of the spectrum is also very well led. The upper sub-range is slightly tempered, in which it resembles the sound of the XLO Limited. On the other hand the Velum is more open, but not as "silky". I think, that this is a sound that is located somewhere between the mentioned XLO and the Cardas Golden Reference. With more aggressive recordings this brings relief, because for example the, quite average recorded, single *Saw Something/Deeper and Deeper* Dave Gahan (Mute, LCDMUTE398, SP CD) from the disc *Hourglass* allowed itself to be played from the beginning to the end, without the need of turning the volume down in some places. It sounded similar on the XLO. This is a deviation, because as heard on Velum and Tara Labs, there is some aggression and sharpening present there. Furutech does not cover anything with a veil, this is not the case, but tones down everything a bit, what is quite common with Japanese products. With recordings, where the treble is a bit withdrawn to start with, like on the Johnson disc (again, I recommend it!) there is less of it than with Cardas, but the impression of "silkeness" remains, and not of darkening. This is important, because the Japanese cables sound rhythmical and with good coherence.

The things that will decide if this is our "play" or not, are not in the extremities of the sound spectrum, and even not in the midrange. The latter is nice, full, maybe without the silkeness of the XLO or openness of the Velum, but in every inch accurate. The thing, that we have to test in your system and decide if this is something you are looking for, is the way Furutech treats dynamics. Like I mentioned, in the macro scale it is splendid, the cable allows the devices to sound strong, with large scale and without limitations. But if we look closer then it will become apparent, that the micro-dynamics is a bit compressed. Please remember that we do talk about a top cable here, not only price wise, but also sound wise, so this not a boorish constriction. I compare the Furutech to the best cables I know, and my remarks must be understood in this context. If I had to compare this effect with something taken from life, then the plugging in of the Furutech after the Tara, Cardas or Velum gives an effect as if we would go from a "common" room to a listening room in our saloon. Immediately everything becomes more "here and now", every move is heard not only by reflection, but also in its directness. When plugging the Furutech – the guitar of Forcione becomes more intimate, the contrabass of Haden sounds in a more "damped" way. This is no dampening by cutting the treble or midrange, but more an effect of "drowning in a pillow". This is not unpleasant, but it is always present, regardless of the disc played.



And that's probably all. In my system both cables brought similar changes and I had no impression that the interconnect is better than the speaker cable or the other way round. In the Ancient Audio system, where the cables were also tested, the interconnect sounded much better, placing itself close behind the Tara Labs ISM 0.8. So you need to test the cables in your systems. They guarantee splendid, strong, very low and agile bass, creamy treble and "intimacy" of the transmission. Their workmanship is nice and there is real engineering behind it, and no snake oil. There are better cables, like the mentioned Tara Labs, but you will have to pay much for such change. In its price it has a strong position, maybe without revelations and dazzles, but also without any weak sides, everything it does, is done at least well. It is in my opinion a very "safe" choice. If one would aim at the best constructions then one can find things, that here and there will be better. But if we do not want to change the subsequent cables and listen to find the slightest changes instead of listening to music in that time, then we can safely invest in the Furutech – it won't hurt.

DESCRIPTION



Both tested cables are from the Reference Series. All most important technologies of this manufacturer were applied, with the Alpha process on top – it consists of cryogenic treatment of the conductors and later its special warming. This results in a better shaped crystalline structure of the metal. On the company page the main characteristics of the cables were described.

Let us start with the interconnect Audio Reference II-NI:

- α (Alpha) conductors – PCOCC copper wire strands
- GC-303 ("Antimagnetic EMI-Absorbent Modules") module
- splendid, rhodium covered, clamped plugs FP-106 (R) with elements with rhodium plated brass
- two shields – the first one from a net of α (Alpha) conductors with 0.12 mm diameter each, and the second one from the GC-303 material with molecules blocking EMI radiation (this is the mentioned module)
- isolation from foamed HDPE

Speaker Reference III:

- six strands (2.7 mm) with 20 α (Alpha) wires – OCC, with a diameter 0.18 mm each
- isolation – foamed PE
- double shield – the first one from a net of α (Alpha) conductors with 0.12 mm diameter each, and the second one from the GC-303 material with molecules blocking EMI radiation (this is the module)
 - spades from rhodium plated copper on one side, on the other fantastic, tightened banana plugs from rhodium plated brass

As it turns out, the metal cable boxes are the second shield, they work as filters and there is the GC-303 powder placed. In most cases, like in the [MIT](#) or [Transparent Cable](#) cables those house passive correction elements correcting phase shifts or the capacitance of the cables. Furutech chose a less invasive approach.

Little money, much technology.