

# Furutech

## Reference III Cable Review

Tone Audio – 2009 Issue 21

By Jeff Dorgay



REVIEW

**FURUTECH<sup>®</sup>**  
PURE TRANSMISSION PRODUCTS

## An Affordable Reference From Furutech

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Last year, we gave Furutech an Exceptional Value Award for their AG-12 phono cable.

It remains one of my personal favorites and the reference cable on my three tables that allow an aftermarket tonearm cable. It is very neutral, easy to use and, best of all, reasonably priced.

I've been impressed with the fanatical attention Furutech pays to every step of the cable manufacturing process; they measure and test everything! I think the proof of Furutech's quality is exhibited in how many audio manufacturers use Furutech's power cords, wire and power connectors as OEM components in their products.

Spending a substantial amount of money on cable is a touchy subject. We at TONE take the stance that good cable is the icing on the cake that lets your system's performance shine through. The cables reviewed here are expensive, at about a thousand dollars each, so while they are not unobtainium, nor are they a casual purchase. I feel strongly that the Furutech cables in this review offer enough of an increase in performance over cables in the \$100-\$300 range that they are worth the investment if your system has enough resolution to reveal it.

The 1.2-meter Reference III interconnects have an MSRP of \$1,175 with RCA connectors and \$1,325 with XLR connectors. They are available in lengths of 1.7, 2.2 and 2.7 meters at a slightly higher cost. A 2-meter pair of Reference III speaker cables with spade lugs has an MSRP of \$1,325, and the 3-meter pair is \$1,575. These also are available in a bi-wire version for \$1,575 and \$1,725 respectively.

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### Furutech's Winning Formula

The core technology of Furutech's Reference III cables reviewed here centers around their Alpha OCC conductors and their associated 2-Stage Alpha Super Cryogenic and Demagnetizing process. The more technically minded in the audience are invited to click here to read the eight-page PDF that explains their methodology in depth:

[http://www.furutech.com/news/cables\\_explained.pdf](http://www.furutech.com/news/cables_explained.pdf)

Here's the short version – it all works together very well. Cable junkies will appreciate the great care and flawless execution of Furutech's products, and the music lovers will dig the enhancement it provides for their systems.

As soon as you open the box, you will see that these cables are a work of industrial art. The plugs and speaker-cable spade lugs are finished in rhodium-plated cast brass and polished to a smooth finish. Each set of the Reference III series cables has an extruded module on the end containing Furutech's GC-303 compound, which they claim absorbs EMI, providing quieter backgrounds. These cables are certainly finished to a higher level than their price point would suggest.

### Establishing a Baseline

The next step was to evaluate their reference series cable with the rest of my system. The larger and more complex system you have, the tougher it is to evaluate the change made by just one cable, especially in a system that has quite a few components.

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To keep it simple, I assembled a high-performance system made up of components with which I am intimately familiar: the Luxman L-590a II integrated amplifier, Luxman Du-8 Combination player and the MartinLogan Spires, later substituted for the Harbeth Monitor 40.1's. This pared it down to one set of interconnects and one pair of speaker cables with relatively short runs, making it easy to evaluate any difference made by the cable.

I spent a month listening to this combination, switching back and forth between Cardas Golden Reference (speaker and interconnect) cable and DH Labs Silver Sonic to burn two different perspectives into my consciousness before introducing the Furutech.

Many audiophiles like to mix and match cables, and sometimes the sonic character of a cable can be used as a tone control to fine tune a particular component, but I have really seen the light when it comes to using one manufacturer's cable throughout to feel the effect they have on your system.

### Murky at First, Then Magic

For the first 50 hours, the Reference III cables had a distinct haze, with a somewhat murky sound that lifted completely by 150 hours, so if you buy a set of these cables, I'd suggest setting your CD player on repeat for a few days before you engage in critical listening.

Once the fog lifted, I was very impressed with the cable, and would like to point out to newcomers that every cable requires current to be run through it for a while before it reaches its optimum sound. Though I am *not* in favor of using any of the popular "cable cookers" currently on the market, as I've heard them do more damage than good. Just like a great pot of gumbo, cables need to cook slow and long in the opinion of this writer.

To keep track of the burn-in process, I start my Radio Shack stopwatch and listen to something I've heard thousands of times at 10-15 hour intervals, and I suggest that you do the same. That way, you can get a good handle on what's happening as you burn in the cable. For the naysayers in the audience who think cable break-in is imaginary, apply a little science. Put 200 hours on the cable of your choice and leave an identical pair in a box with no burn-in hours, then compare the two. It helps to have a friend behind your equipment rack to make a quick switch so that you can keep your aural memory intact. *(continued)*



## REVIEW

### Ease and Neutrality

With the necessary amount of break-in time completed, I settled down for serious listening, finally deciding that the tonality of the Reference III cables is very neutral. The Golden Reference that I have listened to for almost four years sounds slightly on the warm, romantic side, which is not a bad thing, and the DH cable used for an equivalent amount of time is always somewhat forward, my choice when I want to give a component some extra zip.

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**I usually have a wide range of music for evaluating components, but with cable, I'm looking for nuance, so I tend to pick music with extremes.**

In that way, it's easier to hear the change that a cable has made in my system. I prefer recordings with known flaws to investigate whether a cable is really adding or subtracting from the presentation. One of my favorite "dreadful" recordings is Audioslave's debut album of the same title on CD. There are some dynamics buried within this album, but you need a system with a lot of dynamic contrast to reveal it. The record sounds forward overall, so any cable with too much zing will give you listener fatigue immediately and the lack of dynamics will crush the recording.

Satisfied that the extremes of the spectrum were not being harmed, moving on to a series of vocal and acoustic-instrument recordings was a true pleasure. The Reference III did a great job with acoustic instruments, leaving tonality and decay well intact.

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Thanks to Furutech's successful noise-reduction technology, I was able to hear very deeply into my favorites that are well-recorded. Even when substituting components that I felt had a known sonic signature, I never thought that the Furutech Reference III cables altered my perception of those components, so this set of cables would not be appropriate if you are searching for tonal control.

Tonality aside, what I could discern easily with the Furutech cables in my system was how much more fine detail and resolution they offered compared with some popular cables in the \$300 range. This is where listening to your favorite pristine recordings is a useful tool. The ability to hear further

into your recordings than you could before is a primary reason for purchasing a higher quality cable, and definitely something in which Furutech excels.

### A Choice for Music Purists

If you are an audiophile and music lover who subscribes to the philosophy that the components in your system should be as accurate and neutral as possible, and that the cables' main job is to be an undistorted conduit, then the Furutech Reference III cables should be at the top of your list. I certainly will be using them as one of my references from now on. ●