

FURUTECH

Sound Rebels FI-50 NCF Series Review
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Furutech FI-50 NCF(R) English ver.



Usually we talk in an indulgent way about plugs, connectors, adapters, splitters, etc. It seems to be common knowledge, that it is worth to use solid and well made products, which are of repeatable high quality, but the threshold between the professional utilitarianism of the Neutrik and the byzantine, almost jewelry-like splendor of for example the top WBT is more than clear. So the question, about where to put the borderline between the common sense, engineer's approach and ... a kind of snobbism and vanity, seems very legitimate. But as it often happens, such borders are not defined by any law, but we define them ourselves, based on our expectations, financial capabilities and sometimes also on what we hear. Interestingly, that last criterion should be the critical one for us audiophiles, but how things are in practice you can easily see looking at what is offered on the market. So let us concentrate on the segment of power cords, where the choice of plugs of unknown origin, "similar" to the world leading products in that area, or conscious usage of widely available models from DIY stores do not surprise anybody. Homebred masters of auto-marketing think, that if you do not notice any difference, then there is no need to pay premium price, and if you can see the differences, you can cover the plug with thermal shrink tube and problem is solved. This is a kind of folklore, which may be interesting for psychologists and anthropologists, but for us, common people, it is far from becoming acceptable. So it is worth to point your attention to the opposite pole – to products backed up with real knowledge, abilities and technology on a level, that excludes "garage" manufacturing. I am talking about

a real shark in the water, offering not only the mentioned plugs, terminals, sockets but also cables – available from spool by meter or factory terminated – the Japanese company Furutech. What is important, if you look at the catalog from this specialist, you will find products proposed to beginners in the audiophile area like the basic 11 (FI-11Cu / FI-E11Cu) costing below 200 zlotys, as well offerings for the true, uncompromised listeners amongst us, the top (at least till recently), piezzo-ceramic 50 (FI-E50(R) / FI-50(R)) for about 1300 PLN a piece. Well, till recently. It happened, that a few weeks before the Audio Video Show in Warsaw, I received the information about planned tuning of this top offering. It should not be a dethronement, but the seemingly cosmetic tuning should re-define the construction of those top plugs. As it often happens in such cases, I assumed I would need to have lots of patience and have to scan the internet for snippets of information to be able to finally touch, and maybe listen to, some top cable equipped with those plugs (Nanoflux ?). Of course that would be conform with the assumption, that 'noblesse oblige' and we can easily think, that a power cord costing more than 15000 zlotys should be equipped with such plug jewelry, and at the same time we would be sure, that the target population would be a selected group of connoisseurs. This is how things usually happen at those price levels. And nobody should complain about that, as everybody knows his or hers place in the queue ... at least theoretically. But sometimes fate can play some tricks, and due to a conjunction of very favorable events, one of my cables, the FP-3TS762, became terminated with a preview pair of the 50, enriched with the NCF marking. And what was the result of this change I will describe below.



The mentioned, very nice, but in fact only apparent coincidence, turned out to be a very well thought through action of the Polish Furutech distributor – the Katowice based RCM. It seems not to be problematic to put the plugs on a cable taken from the spool and start to burn it in, but the question is, with which we could compare it? It would be best to have a sibling cable, created at the same time, with standard plugs fitted. But then the time factor comes into play – as both cables would need extensive burn-in. But due to the fact, that since a dozen months (or more) I use two pieces of the mentioned FP-3TS762 work non-stop in my reference system in the role of all-use cables, so the idea came to life to make the sparring using cables, that are not really at

adequate price levels to the plugs. This allowed however, not only to use very well burned-in cables for the comparison, but also to check, if using such expensive plugs is warranted also on much cheaper wires. Of course this was confirmed some time ago with a competitor of Furutech – the company Oyaide, which offers only one power cord in their catalog (GP X V2), but differentiates the influence and quality of factory confectioned sets depending on which plugs were utilized – the P/C-046 Special Edition “Italian Red” or the P/C-004 Special Edition “Aspirin White”.

But let us concentrate on the tested pair, and see how they tick, looking at the materials supplied by the manufacturer. In their newest, piezzo-ceramic plugs from the FI-50 NCF series, Furutech introduced a series of technological improvements. For example, the multi-layer, made from non-magnetic, stainless steel carcasses were combined with a braid of silver coated carbon fiber, and a damping-isolating cover layer of acetal co-polymer. The above combination was chosen after intensive listening tests conducted by Japanese audiophiles, which clearly shows, that for the R&D department engineers, measurements are only a starting point, and not a goal in itself, and the final decisive measure turns out to be the human hearing, so often depicted by the more technical amongst us, as being very imperfect.

Additionally the carcasses of the plugs were enriched with “active” damping materials, named Nano Crystal 2 Formula – Nano Crystalline, shortened NCF. This material consists of ceramic nano-particles and carbon dust. The NCF is characterized by generating negative ions, which eliminate issues with electrostatics, and converts thermal energy into deep infrared. Using this company designed mixture of ceramic nano-particles with carbon dust, Furutech was able to create a damping “Piezzo Effect” that covers the electrical and mechanical domains.

So much for the theory, with a tad of marketing sweetener, now it is time to start listening, as from the above we see, that even the manufacturers do that. Regarding testing methodology, both cables – the standard and tuned one – were used interchangeably to provide current to the GigaWatt power strip, as well as powered directly the reference, or tested at that time, amplifier. I did not test the cable with the sound sources, as besides one case, long, long time ago, I have not found a device, which would not be able to use the benefits of the three 4.5mm wires. Even a maximally tubed CD-player is not an induction kitchen stove, so its appetite for energy is much closer to the hearts of ecologists.

And now the best, or the first impression, which clearly showed me, that changing plugs, although it seems to be a purely cosmetic thing, should not be treated as such sound wise. With the new plugs almost everything improved. The sound spectrum extremes were extended, what allowed the system to play a step further to the bottom and top end. In addition, at first you could have the impression, that the whole is presented a tad thinner, but this is just an illusion that lasts until true bass kicks in. You just need to play things like “Hallucination Engine” Material, or the true system-killer “Khmer” Nils Petter Molvaer. The genesis of those illusive observations becomes clear to us after a few minutes listening to such music – it is not that the sound got thinner, but all kinds of dust, distortion and all other parasitic artifacts were removed from it, which were influencing the audible frequencies. Without this “coat”, which was flowing to our ears unwanted, we can hear much more of the information hidden in the source, and we can enter the structure of the recording much deeper and better.

Even playing the “11:11” Rodrigo y Gabriela almost brought me a heart attack, and supposedly I do not have a heart. The attack was so immediate, that it was absolutely stunning, and struck from the speakers like a lightning bolt. Each hit of the body, each movement of the hands on the necks of the guitars were audible and palpable in such a realistic way, that we could talk about true holography here.

Yet this colossal, as I cannot describe the change in a more toned down way, improvement of the resolution was not at the price of even smallest cooling or emotional sterilizing of the sound. On the contrary. Juiciness and vitality of the pulsating musical tissue, deprived from the veil of distortion enchanted with hyper-reality of a 4k screen showing specially prepared visual material. And this absolute blackness. Of course I know, that the motive of inscrutable, tar-black background comes up more often in our reviews, than lowering of taxes in election programs of every party, but the new Furutech plugs somehow re-define its existence. It is not about the level of blackness and which black is blacker, but about the order, chronology or the moment it appears. The fact of its existence remains unchanged, but what changes is, that usually the effect of the velvet curtain is created by covering everything behind the last musician, or group of musicians. This method is very efficient, albeit radical, because it loses the effect of depth, space where the sustains can freely extinguish. The newest 50 NCF approach this aspect differently. The original room retains its size, but it is completely dark. It is as if we would go into a cave during a starless night and after going in for a dozen meters we would switch off the headlight and all other light sources. It will be completely dark, but we will have still the impression of the size of the structure around us, as well as the distances to the side walls and the ceiling. Only in that darkness, the musicians are placed, according to the sound engineer's guidelines, and they are lighted by warm, but very precise spotlights, which follow them according to stage movements. Does it sound interesting? Of course it does. Please play for example „Il Trovatore“ Verdi with the irreplaceable Pavarotti, to hear with your own ears, how brilliant this solution is.

The newest version of the top Furutech plugs, FI-50 NCF(R) defines new boundaries of precision, cleanness and musical realism at the same time. Cleaning the sound from harmful artifacts allows to enjoy crystal clear music, and at the same time be sure, that our precious electronics does not need to work on contaminated, parasitic modified diet. In addition, I hope, that the described influence of the 50 on the sound of an inexpensive cable, like the FP-3TS762, will make you realize, that each moment is the right one for investing in seemingly trivial elements, like good quality plugs.

Marcin Olszewski

System used in this test:

- CD/DAC: Ayon CD-1sx
- Digital input selector: Audio Authority 1177
- Network Music Player: Olive O2M; laptop Dell Inspiron 1764 + JRiver Media Center
- Turntable: Transrotor Dark Star Silver Shadow + S.M.E M2 + Phasemation P-3G
- Phonostage: Abyssound ASV-1000, AVM P1.2
- Integrated amplifier: Electrocompaniet EC15, Pass INT-250
- Loudspeakers: Gauder Akustik Arcona 80 + spike extenders
- IC RCA: Antipodes Audio Katipo; Siltech Classic Anniversary 770i, Harmonix Hiriji „Milion“
- IC XLR: LessLoss Anchorwave; Organic Audio; Amare Musica
- Digital IC: Fadel art DigiLitz; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
- USB Cables: Wireworld Starlight; Goldenote Firenze Silver
- Speaker Cables: Organic Audio; Signal Projects Hydra
- Power Cables: Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R; Organic Audio Power; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II; Ardento Power; Organic Audio Reference Power
- Power distribution board: GigaWatt PF-2 + Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R

- Wall Socket: Furutech FT-SWS(R)
- Antivibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
- Ethernet cables: Neyton CAT7+
- Accessories: Sevenrods Dust-caps; Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; HighEndNovum PMR Premium; Albat Revolution Loudspeaker Chips

<http://soundrebels.com/artykuly/recenzje/item/696-furutech-fi-50-ncf-r-english-ver>