

REVIEW

by Douglas Brown

Furutech

DSS-4.1 Speaker Cables



Japan... land of the rising HiFi. When one thinks of Japanese cultural symbols, thoughts of drift cars, pachinko machines, portable music players, and Shinkansen bullet trains readily... ehm... drift through the mind. Japan is a detail-oriented country. No other society on earth can so happily obsess on making minor improvements to small items to invoke significant increases in overall performance -- especially with cars and electronics.

Founded in April 1988, Japanese specialist parts and cable manufacturer Furutech has a proud 30 plus year tradition of fabricating outstandingly good sounding and value packed audiophile cables, A/C power distributors, outlets, plugs, connectors, and ancillary parts.

When NOVO asked if I'd like to review a pair of Furutech's new flagship DSS-4.1 OCC-DUCC speaker cables (SCs), I embraced the assignment as passionately as Stormy Daniels embraces female patrol officers from the Columbus Ohio Sheriff's Department.

DESIGN & FEATURES

A few years ago, rumours began circulating that Furutech was working on a new bulk speaker cable that would re-write the price/performance ratio and provide jaw-dropping sound without the space mission price. This cable would use cutting edge DUCC (Ultra Crystallized High Purity) copper licensed from Mitsubishi and combine it with Furutech's own Alpha-OCC. In early 2019, that cable finally arrived in North

America.

My review pair of the new DSS-4.1 speaker cables was terminated with Furutech's own custom fabricated FT-211R ['R' is for Rhodium] spade connectors on the amplifier side and FT-212R locking banana plugs on the speaker side. These lightweight spades and bananas both feature non-resonant housings and non-magnetic setscrews. The DSS-4.1 speaker cable can be purchased in bulk (non terminated), or ordered with your choice of connectors.

The DSS-4.1's core conductors are fashioned out of four distinct layers. The center is comprised of an NCF PE core. The second layer is a bundle of 89 individual strands of 0.18mm diameter Alpha-OCC copper and rotates to the right. The third layer is 39 individual

strands of 0.18mm diameter Alpha-OCC copper that counter-rotates to the left. And the fourth outer conductor layer is 62 individual strands of 0.13mm diameter Alpha OCC-DUCC copper that counter-rotates to the right.

Furutech then adds ten(!) separate layers of shielding and insulation on top of the OCC copper conductors. At about an inch in overall diameter, the DSS-4.1 is quite flexible and easy to install. The outer sleeve is a black and white snakeskin-patterned nylon yarn jacket.

Furutech and MMI have invested more R&D into these speaker cables than NASA sunk into the Apollo space missions during the 1960s. Massive investments into R&D and materials engineering don't mean a damn thing though if a speaker cable doesn't have stellar sonics. So... how do Furutech's new flagship SCs sound?

PERFORMANCE

Minutes after installing the DSS-4.1 speaker cables into my main 2-channel tube rig, the improvement in sonics was so clear that I could literally hear it in other parts of my home. Audio critics love listening to walk through three-dimensional stereo sound in the same way that a mosquito enjoys sucking blood from a diabetic's ankle. It's something we can't resist. The increase in sound quality was so immediate and dramatic that it forced me to return to my listening room.

The DSS-4.1's sonic signature is one of warmth, smoothness, and energy. These SCs have an ultra-low noise floor that allows subtle sonic nuances to emerge from an ink black background. Sonic details sounded natural and organic. Much like a mile wide diameter oceanic sinkhole in Belize, the profound depth and transparency of the sound let me dive deep into recordings of all genres of music.

Furutech's SCs recreated the tone and timbre of instruments with a palpable *feel* that created one of the most vivid, lifelike, and expansive soundstages that I've ever heard -- at any asking price. This ability to recreate realism from recorded music is what every audiophile longs to hear. Instead of chasing the sonic dragon in a Tokyo taxi during rush hour traffic, I felt like I was finally flying on the fabled beast's back.

The DSS-4.1 never altered the base sonic characteristics of any of the stereo systems I used to test them.

Examples...? My all tube Sonic Frontiers rig has lightning-fast transients, glorious NOS tube warmth, spine chilling timbral accuracy, and toe-tapping PRaT. Furutech's flagship SCs simply allowed MORE of this sound to come forth.

I compared the DSS-4.1 (\$3,050 CAD) to the following speaker cables: A), Cardas' Golden Cross (2.5m pair- \$3,200 USD); B), AudioQuest's Meteor (2.5m pair- \$5,600 USD); C), High Fidelity Cables' (HFC's) Ultimate (3.0m pair- \$14,000 USD); and D), Stealth's Dream v16 (3.0m pair- \$18,000 USD).

Against Furutech's beast, the Cardas and AQ cables were veiled, blurred, and sluggish. Their sonics were more tainted than Flint Michigan tap water. The bass registers sounded like a drunken racehorse that'd sucked back a case of organic wheat beer and 16 pickled eggs had blown a toxic, thunderous, and one note fart. Stated succinctly, there was no comparison in sound quality. Across the frequency spectrum, the DSS-4.1 SCs delivered significantly better PRaT, timbral accuracy, and a more lifelike sound than the AQ and Cardas models.

The \$18K USD Dream v16 cables were more transparent and had more midrange warmth. HFC's \$14K USD Ultimate speaker cables had faster transients and marginally deeper resolution. Germane to its \$3K CAD level price, the resolution, imaging, and dynamics of the DSS-4.1 were all a lot closer than I expected them to be to compared these low five-figure level speaker cables.

Recorded in 1961, *First Time! The Count Meets the Duke* is a statement record within the history of 20th Century jazz. Back in '61, Duke Ellington and Count Basie brought their two full jazz orchestras together to record side by side. What they captured is a striking example of modern up-tempo jazz.

On *First Time!*, both orchestras challenge each other to play better. The arrangements in the songs "Battle Royal", "Take the A-Train", "Wild Man", and "Segue in *C*" allowed the stars from both bands to take turns soloing. In 1961, these were (arguably) the two best jazz ensembles on the planet. And my heavens did the DSS-4.1 SCs let the stunning technical dexterity and musical synergy between these two titanic bands to flow through my stereo.

Released in Feb 1975, Rush's second album *Fly By Night* is a cornerstone in the foundation of harder rock.

Featuring eight sternum-belted tracks that successfully balance memorable melodies with galactic heaviness and an unstoppable groove, *Fly By Night* showcases the landmark songs "Anthem", "Best I Can", "Beneath, Between, and Behind", and the epic 8:37 length opus "By-Tor and the Snow Dog".

With the DSS-4.1 SCs in place, the wealth of sonic information captured on *Fly By Night* sounded as organic and riveting as I've ever heard it. From Alex Lifeson's sybaritic guitar riffs and screaming lead solos to Geddy Lee's granite solid bass lines and high-pitched falsetto shrieks, the cohesiveness of sound presented by the DSS-4.1s was reference calibre. Neil Peart's bombastic drumming and percussion work was an utter delight to hear too.

Resolution, transparency, and insight into the timbre of individual instruments were all very close to being state-of-the-art. In particular, the warmth and cohesiveness of the sonics on the album's last track "In The End" gave me goosebumps. Through the DSS-4.1 SCs, Lifeson's slow, brooding, and percussive guitar chords breathed with passion and feeling.

If you'd like to hear your stereo sound its best, Furutech's new DSS-4.1 speaker cables will bring you much closer to reference calibre sound at a fraction of the price of other companies' flagship cables. The stellar sonics of these SCs make many higher priced audiophile cables sound -- and even smell -- worse than the Tokyo Tsukji open-air fish market during a summer hot spell.

Ten years ago, the DSS-4.1 could not have existed. The technology to manufacture this cable at such a low price just didn't exist. Furutech and MMI have unleashed a monster speaker cable that competes with other reference SCs priced in the low five-figure range. Accordingly, the \$3,050 CAD level DSS-4.1 should be nominated for NOVO's product of the year. □

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