

September 2020

Enjoy the Music.com®

Review By Rick Becker

Furutech NCF Clear Line Mini Power Optimizer

Last, but not least, comes Furutech's NCF Line Mini Power Conditioner. This is a weird company that makes what seems to be a lot of unrelated parts and components for the High End. They ask the questions that few other companies think to ask. What unifies it all is their unrelenting pursuit of excellence, sometimes at multiple price points. I'll let you go check out their catalog online. Their newest release is the NCF Clear Line. NCF stands for Nano Crystal Formula which reputedly generates negative ions to eliminate static and convert thermal heat into infrared light. (No, it doesn't glow in the dark.) The Clear Line is not technically a power conditioner in that it has no stabilizing effects on the voltage, and has no actual circuit inside. It is a completely passive device that they prefer to call an "AC power optimizer."

Well, it seems like everything is Nano-something these days and there are lots of plug-in power conditioners around, but I jumped for Furutech based on their reputation and the excellent result I had with their FI-12ML right-angle AC plug which I used to convert my Synergistic Research QLS (Quantum Line Strip) to a direct plug-in unit, thereby eliminating the need for a separate power cord. This conversion left me with the Schurter C14 IEC mains connector that I used in the captive power cord conversion I wrote about above. (Waste not, want not.)



I don't know if these mini power optimizers require a burn-in or not. I plugged it into the video system and let my wife do the heavy lifting. I'm told it requires a 24-hour burn-in, but I went way beyond that. It does seem that they need a moment to settle in, once they have been inserted. I started first by adding it to the 20A dedicated line that my Synergistic Research PowerCell 8SE runs on. It wasn't an "Oh, wow!" experience, probably because the system runs at such a high level to begin with, given the SR power conditioner and a lot of SR \$2k-\$3k power cords feeding the components. And going A/B every minute or two didn't make me scream and shout either. But once I caught on to the difference the NCF Clear Line makes, it was a keeper.

In addition to all the *clichés* of improvement — you know the list — the periphery of the soundstage became as clear and noteworthy as the musicians in the spotlight. The trailing ends of sustained notes faded delicately into silence, not noise, and the musicians became personified, rather than being just point sources for the instruments. That a \$250 plug-in could make that much difference in rig that already sounded like it cost well over six-figures was practically embarrassing. Moreover, it worked as well with turntable, tuner, and CD playback.

I thought twice about opening it up to see what was inside as I feared that it might be like one of those mail-order mattresses that are impossible to get back in the box if you decide to return it. But as I said above, I didn't want to return this. I'm told the magic ingredients are the NCF material that is sloshed around in the carbon fiber/nylon shell and vibration damping Air Coils that damp the vibrations coming from the socket electrodes. (You can see brush strokes under bright light, and what looks like thin, uniform layers of finely woven cloth inside the clear tube.) In addition to eliminating static, the NCF crystals (a combination of ceramic particles and carbon powder) are said to act as electrical *and* mechanical damping material. Naturally, they were not about to tell me everything about their proprietary product.



Back in my home office I plugged it into a typical power strip with surge protection that connects to the printer, monitor/TV and laptop. Using affordable workhorse Grado headphones I experienced a similar positive shift in quality with most of the same improvements on this list of YouTube videos including

[The Blaze live at Aiguille du Midi in Chamonix, France for Cercle](#)

[Bach: Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor BWV 1008 - Pincombe | Netherlands Bach Society](#)

[Norah Jones Live from Austin TX](#)

[Ginger Baker Trio - Charlie Haden - Bill Frisell / live 1995](#)

More expensive headphones would likely have revealed additional improvements and probably resulted in a lot less sleep. My Dell Inspiron laptop with a 15.6" full HD IPS screen has a pretty decent picture to begin with, so the improvement in image quality and the black level was not as great as the improvement in sound quality, but welcomed.

Moving out into the family room where another 20A dedicated line feeds a Blu-ray player feeding an upscale Sony HD TV with sound fed into a Magic Tube Research IAM 34SE integrated tube amplifier driving vintage Coincident Speaker Technology's Partial Eclipse Mk II speakers, again, the sound showed similar improvement with instruments being a lot less homogenized. It was much easier to hear past prominent instruments to those backing the main performers with much greater clarity. The country/bluegrass ensemble Bruce Springsteen brought together for *We Shall Overcome; The Seeger Sessions* was a delight in this regard.

Visually, the Sony was so good that I could not detect much, if any, improvement, even as I looked for noise in black areas. The one exception was that subtitles popped and were noticeably easier to read. Perhaps I'm better trained for listening than I am for watching TV.

While I have not compared the NCF Clear Line with variations on this theme from other companies, I expected a lot from Furutech and they delivered. One would be a fool to spend thousands of dollars (or *tens* of thousands) on a new component in search of the clarity and relaxed listening experience brought by the NCF Clear Line for only \$250. And I make this suggestion even if you already own a serious power conditioner. This device does not duplicate the function of a power conditioner, it *supplements* it. Do shop around but beware of counterfeit knock-offs that are said to be out there and buy from trusted Furutech dealers.

Review Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y6fdcmz2>