

hardware review

Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II USB rings the changes

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Trevor Butler



Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II USB cable

Never did I think that a one-metre cable would change the sound of my system quite so much. But did this short USB cable bring a change for the better? Speaking to the guys from Hegel at the Oslo Hi-Fi Show I decided that I wanted to experiment with streaming from Apple Music via my MacBook connected to the H600, rather than relying on AirPlay [over the network] whose quality has recently been criticised for limited bit-rate and sampling.

Also at the show was Tellurium Q's founder and MD, Geoff Merrigan. He promised to let me try his latest USB cable to see how I got on. So it was that, some days later, a sample of his new Ultra Silver II USB arrived.

Tellurium Q

Tellurium Q exists only because Geoff Merrigan lost a bet. Incredible but true. Otherwise, audiophiles would not be able to experience his growing range of cables. The company has near global distribution and has twice won a Queen's Awards for Enterprise. It's not just what the Tellurium Q cables are made of but the way they are made that's part of the secret, I was told. No wonder factory visits are heavily discouraged, for fear that secret gets out and the competition follow suit or copies flood the market at bargain prices.

The tech is based on the premise of "preserving relative phase relationships in a signal". All very scientific sounding and my sample, arriving beautifully packed in black tissue paper, was accompanied by an explanatory leaflet.

Tellurium offers three cable 'families': Blue, Black and Silver; these are available in everything from power leads, speaker cables and both RCA and XLR interconnects. Blue is said to be slightly 'warm sounding' and 'richer' with Silver described as 'Detailed and revealing'.

Connection and science

My sample Ultra Silver II USB lead was just one-metre long so a rearrangement of my listening room was necessary in order to site the laptop closer to the Hegel amplifier. This isn't going to

be as convenient as selecting tracks from the comfort of the listening chair, but needs much in the quest for improved performance. I also made sure to adjust the MacBook settings to achieve best-possible audio quality output via USB.

Having once worked for a manufacturer who was quoted (albeit misquoted) as saying that all amplifiers sound the same, there will doubtless be those who feel that all cables sound the same, or at least should do.

I remember, in my BBC studio days, of engineers having specific microphone preferences, and even others (including myself) who favoured one monitoring loudspeaker over another. But never can I recall anyone swapping different cable types, or indeed there being a choice.



Nevertheless, a search of the Internet will reveal several credible sources who can measure the difference between cable types, and with digital signals. Even though, in theory, it is 'just a mix of 1s and 0s' being transmitted.

Without going into all the ramifications, we are talking about the effects of noise being picked up by the cable and transmitted alongside the signal. Theoretically shorter cables should fare better than longer ones, but some manufacturers have found that this is not always the case. Higher performing DACs tend to be better able to cope with noise on the signal but they will always deliver better results if that noise is kept to a minimum.

But be wary since there can be measurements which bother the eye and not the ear. It will be the latter that audiophiles are more interested in and so personal experimentation with a range of cables is a must, and this is where contact with a friendly dealer comes into its own.





Sound quality

Before members of the panel arrived to voice their opinions, I spent several days experimenting (rather unscientifically, I admit) with the Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II USB lead and a longer one (some 3m) that I use for rough in-room frequency response measurements. This is a 2001 vintage model and came, I think, from RS Components and probably cost £20 or so. So a far cry from the audio-grade one I was testing.

My first impression when using the Ultra Silver II USB was of an audible improvement in bass response and an apparent increase in treble output. In fact, such was the increased level of low frequency that I moved my Revival Atalante 3 loudspeakers a further foot into the room. The bass was far more defined, appeared to go slightly deeper while being quicker and tighter. The change in high frequency character was interesting in that the treble was now more detailed certainly, extended even, but on some of my own analogue recordings (made on quarter-inch tape and dating back as far as 1983) I was aware of hiss and tape noise which previously had not bothered me. My budget cable was acting as filter to remove these unwanted artefacts while the Tellurium Q's increased resolution unveiled them.

Trying some commercial recordings which I like to think I know well, perhaps unsurprisingly those with lots of 'top' appeared even brighter, notably Tony Christie and Laura Branigan. However, some discs which I had oft regarded as being slightly 'dull' assume a lively presentation and became much more enjoyable thanks to the 'magic' of the Ultra Silver II USB.

Panel's views

Without exception, the view of panel members endorsed the use of the Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II USB cable. Comments such as "wow, what an improvement" and "that's the easiest way I've heard of upgrading a system", were made.

With Bob James' 1970s jazz track *Angela*, famed for being the theme from *Taxi* even I noted that timing improved and this is one of my key criteria for replay. Not only did our feet tap involuntarily but the system now seemed much keener to reveal the underlying tune in a hugely involving and captivating way. Switching to the basic (and longer) lead, was like inserting a filter into the reproduction. With the Ultra Silver II USB the bass and treble were more detailed with extra layers of information being audibly transmitted, it's easy to see why this was a Grammy-award winning track.

Turning to a song which was a hit here in the UK, *Birdhouse in Your Soul* from the alternative rock band They Might Be Giants, which is a quirky song but is clearly very well recorded. The production qualities confirm its popularity and it sounded slightly more forward with the Tellurium Q cable in circuit, lyrics were a tad clearer and the treble information increased to bring an overall improvement.

Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II USB

Panel members noted how the Ultra Silver II USB improved the clarity of a track whose key changes and chord progressions sounded a mite muddled on the basic cable, not quite a mishmash but in that general direction.



Conclusion

So, to confirm the measurements, digital cables do sound different and effect a system's overall sound. In Ultra Silver II USB, Tellurium Q have created a cable that is capable of uplifting even a modestly-priced system.

In my usually warm-sounding set-up, the cable added brightness, air and definition, increased HF detail and also improved the bass response to the extent that I moved the loudspeakers forward. The panel members appreciated the audible difference, citing it as a definite improvement and a simple way to elevate a system while retaining all the existing components.



The ear is all about great music and great sound. It is written by hard bitten audio enthusiasts who strive to find the most engaging, entertaining and great value components and music of the highest calibre. This really is what living is all about.