

Tellurium Q Ultra Black II RCA cable and loudspeaker cable

by Jason Kennedy

There is nothing like telling the uninitiated that cable makes a big difference to sound quality if you want to elicit a “Shut up! Are you mad?” response. Even for those within the fold, the notion of cable differences being significant has taken a long time to become established and incredulity remains strong. Yet, as practically anyone who has been given an A/B demonstration will tell you, cables do make a clear difference; quite often a bigger one than electronics, at least on a first impression basis.

Geoff Merrigan at Tellurium Q makes matters apparently worse by not divulging even the smallest details about what goes into his cables; he almost challenges unbelievers to stop looking for reasons and just listen to results. After all, it's all very well knowing that a cable is made out of finely woven slivers of unobtainium but if you don't know what that really means in terms of characteristics you are better off sucking and seeing, or maybe listening and learning.

Tellurium Q's Ultra Black II is not – as I had thought – the range topper in the catalogue (there are several tiers above it and even more below). But, it's a large range of cables to choose from and I guess that you have to use your budget to determine what level to start at. TQ Ultra Black II speaker cable has a wide (40mm) and fairly flat construction with conductors spaced apart in the

style of Naim NACA5 but considerably wider. An inner plastic covering of some kind (PVC?) has a woven cover that terminates in nicely finished aluminium fittings where flying leads are used to provide flexibility of connection. Termination can be a spade or hollow banana plug; our sample was supplied with the latter. No indication is given as to the nature of the conductors, but the wide spacing means that the cable will have high inductance and low capacitance. Build quality is high and the cable has direction indicators on the heat-shrink tubing around the plugs.

There is even less information available about Ultra Black II RCA interconnect, which also has a braided outer and direction indication but nothing to give away the nature of the materials or the topology of the design. What TQ does say is that it uses their TeCu connector that suggests that the plug is made out of copper, which is gold-plated so you can't be absolutely sure. The RCA plug is in the style of WBT locking plugs with a thread that means the ring part of the plug clamps onto the socket when the body is turned clockwise. The main difference with WBT is that the outer body is plastic rather than ▶



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- ▶ metal; less is generally more when it comes to metal in connectors. It's a nice plug... if you don't have to plug it in and out in the time-honoured style of cable reviews. It's a conveniently flexible, almost floppy cable, so much so that it's hard to imagine there is any shielding used in its construction.

The speaker cables are a little more unwieldy but not difficult to use unless you are looking for a discreet install, in which case they wouldn't be a first choice. The character of the speaker cables is distinctly pacy; this is very much a rhythm-oriented cable, where timing is given top billing regardless of the music being played. And this makes it very engaging and powerful; my foot started tapping of its own accord and I found myself swept up with the groove on all manner of tracks. Adding the Ultra Black II RCA interconnect reinforced this balance and opened up the soundstage, cymbal splashes became more obvious, and guitar notes more pronounced. It's very much a leading edge cable, but avoids the forwardness that other cables of its ilk tend to introduce. It has a superb sense of immediacy and acoustic instruments like drum kits sound all the more real as a result. Bass is likewise fast and pacy; it's not as extended as some cables, perhaps, but deep and powerful enough.

Imaging could be more expansive but that is to judge it by rather more expensive standards; taken on its own the image has good depth and height and seems to be well proportioned with voices fitting in with bands rather than leaping out, production notwithstanding. Lou Reed's 'Walk on the Wild Side' [*Transformer*, RCA] is taut with good kick drum and separation of instruments. The strings in particular benefit from this because they are one of the quieter elements within this iconic tune; it inspired me to play a more recent Reed piece called 'Vanishing Act' from *The Raven* [Sire]. These cables relayed the drop dead silent background and the palpable presence of Reed's voice over a strong but tight bass backdrop. It's a beautifully phrased performance where both voice and piano sound excellent.

Tellurium Q supplied some jumpers to use on bi-wire speakers rather than having the cost of two cable runs. These sounded clearly better than

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Construction details for both cables

Conductor: Not Specified!

Dielectric: See 'conductor'

Shielding: See 'dielectric'

Type: Analogue interconnect with RCA jack terminations

Price: £430/1m pair

Type: Loudspeaker cable with 4mm banana terminations

Price: £310/m

Manufacturer: Tellurium Q

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Distributor: Kog Audio

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the standard jumpers on a pair of Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3 speakers, which showed just how good the depth rendering is on the Ultra Black II cables. I played a new Amon Tobin album [*Fear in a Handful of Dust*, Nomark] which is a little bit on the abstract side with a lot of percussive electronica, but the TQ revealed the rhythms clearly and once again had my toe tapping without any apparent suggestion on my behalf. The Hadouk Trio's *Live à FIP* recording of 'Vol De Nuit' [Mélodie] has deep, all encompassing bass synth that can often obscure the melody played by double bass. Here the taut nature of the bass meant that the synth didn't overwhelm the lead instrument, but still let you appreciate the nimbleness of the playing.

Tellurium Q Ultra Black II is a remarkably coherent and 'well-timed' cable. It's not the richest in tonal terms but more than makes up for this with an ability to make all manner of music sound engaging and enjoyable. It works with all sorts of music too, because it puts the message before the sound. Communication is the aim of the game and these TQs are a fine conduit. +