

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Tellurium Q Ultra Black II

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A slightly belated Happy New Year to all of you! I hope you had a great end to 2018 and that 2019 delivers health and happiness, whatever the political climate outside your listening room. Over Christmas I was able to thoroughly run in two pairs of Tellurium Q Ultra Black cables prior to doing some serious listening while the festive season rapidly became a memory. The first is the original Ultra Black, the other is the new Mark II version. When Geoff Merrigan, the managing director of Tellurium Q asked me what length of cables I would need I said a five metre pair would do the trick, terminated in banana plugs at both ends. He said that he had seen pictures of my room and how would I feel about having one long cable and one shorter one for the speaker nearest the rack, which is in the corner of the room? "I know that probably goes against everything you have been told over the years, but trust me, it will work just fine". Right, said I, let's give it a go.

I use Tellurium Q Black II as my reference cable at home, so I was of course intrigued as to what would happen with the much more expensive stable mate. The Ultra Black cables are a lot chunkier, a fact not lost on my wife who commented on them when she first set eyes on them.

During the running in period we watched quite a few seasonal movies. They're not exactly intellectually stimulating, but there's nothing wrong with a bit of rom-com from time to time. Love Actually was one of the films and is no stranger to our Blu-Ray player. There is a line delivered in it by Scottish actor Gregor Fisher which has always sounded like "10 minutes at Elton John's and you're as a gay as..." - we always thought it was "meatball". My wife turned to me and said "It's maypole; not meatball. That's the first time I have ever heard that clearly!". She was genuinely taken aback that these cables could make that much difference - not that she then rushed to sanction a purchase!

So how does that performance manifest itself in music replay, which let's face it is what most of buy expensive cable for. All I can tell you is that the longer these are guests in my system, the harder it is going to be to send them home! Everything that you want from a decent speaker cable is present. Tuneful bass, glorious midband and sweet treble are things which I take for granted with my more modest TQ Black II and they are of course present, but with what feels like added energy, musicality and a strong sense of 'being there'. I am at last hearing what my Linn LP12 can actually do! The detail, the microdynamics, the musicality, the excitement, the scale of the music, are all massively enhanced through the Ultra Black II. I have a stack of vinyl down from my shelves, just waiting to be played. I am hearing so much deeper into the mix of recordings which I have listened to for years. Nick Mason's drumming on all the Pink Floyd stuff I played, for example, highlighted what a subtle player he is, each beat of his stick clear, each different tom tom and snare drum distinctive. After more than 50 years listening to this great band, I finally appreciate just how much he contributed to the finished product.

To do the review properly I of course also listened to the original Ultra Black cables before I installed the Mark II versions. I enjoyed what they did very much but I was genuinely taken aback when the newer ones replaced them. Tellurium Q never explain what they do to improve their cables from one generation to the next and why should they? Why give your competition a look behind the curtain?

However, whatever it is it works wonders. I have yet to hear a speaker cable which delivers timing like this one. I cannot quantify scientifically the difference between the two generations but if pressed I'd say they are 30 to 40 percent better. That is a big leap in performance.

For comparison, I took the Ultra Black IIs to a friend who runs a small retail hi-fi business from home. We compared the Ultra Black II with a pair of less expensive but well regarded



cables from another UK manufacturer. The price differential is considerable, so we expected the Ultra Black to be better but my goodness neither of us expected just how much better they would be in practice. Sometimes the returns on extra investment are not diminished. We used three different brands of amplifier and for different loudspeakers. The results were consistent across the board.

Let's cut to the chase. Over £300 a metre is a lot to pay for any cable. Is TQ Ultra Black II a good place to spend your hard earned cash? Let me put it this way, if you are hankering after an upgrade to your system, I would urge you to borrow a pair of these from your friendly retailer and try them at home. That amplifier upgrade you were thinking about might be something you could delay for a long while. Get a pair of these and see what your current system is really capable of giving to you.

And what about the unequal lengths of cable? Did that have a detrimental effect to the sound? As far as I could detect, absolutely not. If you have an asymmetric layout as I do, you genuinely only need to buy what you need. There, I have saved you some money!

A good friend of mine manages a well respected retail outlet in South West London, and gave me a lot of invaluable advice and guidance when I decided to get a Linn LP12, which I did last year. When I told him what I was reviewing he said "Good, now you will find out just how good that LP12 really is!". He was right.