Would you invest the value of an upmarket

car in new cables? Take our word for it: it will enhance your system.

Mains cables
Audioquest NRG Wild

In the following system configurations:
7 x 0.9m, €1,700 ea.
2 x 1.8m, €2,600 ea.

Digital cables
Wild Digital

1 x 1.0m, €2,100 ea.

By Lothar Brandt

What a wonderful sentence: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." When the great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) wrote these words as the crowning conclusion to his 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus' in 1918, the final year of the Great War, he was certainly not yet thinking of Internet forums and quite definitely not of the hopeless trench warfare that rages there at times. Those feuding with particularly great ire online currently include supporters and opponents of 'cable sound'. In light of the verbal diarrhoea to which many a keyboard warrior gives vent there shielded by anonymity, it is a shame that they don't take Wittgenstein's words at least a little to heart.

However, at the end of the day it is not a philosophical magazine that you're reading, but AUDIOphile, which is devoted to the pleasure gained from listening to music. I therefore don't want to get drawn at all into any pseudo-philosophical fundamental debates. I just want to tell you about my own experiences - with cables. To be more precise: with a set of cables from Audioquest's 'Wild' range. Somewhat blushingly I must admit: worth the cost of an upmarket car, all added together. And let's be clear from the outset: I've got to give them back – all of them. And let me add: if the hatemongers now stir up a witch hunt atmosphere against what they regard as hocus pocus, I don't care. For to be honest, my experiences were pleasurable. They'll remain that way, and I'm sticking to that view.

I don't want to start a crusade under the banner 'Hi-fi needs ultra-expensive cables'. That would be about as much use in debating with staunch 'basic cables will do just as well' ideologists as trying to convey the joy of driving a Ferrari to an eco-fundamentalist. And completely cabling up a system with regal cables such as those from Audioquest does have something in common with driving a Ferrari. It's expensive fun. But what fun!

William E. 'Bill' Low has done a lot to ensure that fun. The founder of Audioquest is devoted to providing the fastest possible, most loss-free possible relay of signals. In his high-class cables, pre-fabricated in the USA and customised for Europe in Holland, the electrons dart through perfect surface copper and silver. The geometry inside the cables between positive and negative conductors and

Interconnect
Wild Blue Yonder

1 Paar 0,5 m à 3300 Euro
2 Paare 1,0 m à 4200 Euro
2 Paare 1,5 m à 5100 Euro

Speaker cable
Wild Wood Full Range

1 Paar 2,5 m à 11850 Euro

complete
52950 Euro

shields obeys meticulously researched physical laws. The contacts to the plugs are not made by prosaic soldering, which can potentially impair the contact, but under high pressure using the so-called cold-welding process.

So far, so labour intensive, so expensive, so good. But why does every member of the Wild family give a piggyback ride to a sort of 12-centimetre little tube, reminiscent of a case for discrete reading glasses?

Every higher value Audioquest cable includes DBS, the company's 'Dielectric-Bias System' (US patent number 7,126,055). In the shiny black case is a battery pack that generates 72 volts. Seeing this for the first time, I started to do the sums: aha, that would mean a whopping 1,296 watts at a four-ohm speaker and thus its almost certain demise. If, indeed if, this DC voltage were to be in the AC voltage signal path. Where, however, it naturally has no business to be.

No, via an unimposing, attached minicable, Bill Low connects the positive terminal to a wire in the middle of the Wild cable's complex geometry. For electronics experts: only the voltage source's cathode is in contact with this wire, as the battery's negative terminal is on the external shielding foil, which then serves as the DBS anode. Thus while the cable's complete insulation is within what in comparison to the signal voltage is a very strong electrical field, there is no current flowing at all. And therefore the batteries also do not 'run out' – the chemical power packs should always last for some three to five years. If you want to check them now again, you press a small button next to an LED, which in normal conditions indicates operational status with a gentle green glimmer. Given the acquisition price of the cable, I would expect your preferred Audioquest dealer to take care of replacing the cases, attached to the cable by two creped straps, for free.

What does the addicted customer have to forgo during the replacement period? Well, I have to admit that the concrete effects are beyond my schoolboy physics knowledge. I'll therefore say nothing and let Bill Low speak: "DBS, that is the advance charging of the insulation with an appreciably higher level of voltage than in normal music use, reduces non-linear phasing errors in not one but two ways: Through exposing the insulation material to a constantly maintained electrostatic field the >

material's molecules become polarised, which significantly reduces the negative effect. The saturation of the material makes it impossible for the insulation to absorb any further energy and therefore to discharge it again later as well. The dielectric needs time to take shape."

Although the master thus insists on two weeks running-in time even for his DBS cables before optimum performance is achieved, I interpret his words and actions to mean: from the moment you start using it, a cable such as this is ready to go with almost its optimum conductivity. Listening to music could thus now begin. However, I'm curious and first send the cables to a test lab to find out what there is to find out. And, as expected, lab head Peter Schüller declines: as the DBS packet is not in the signal path, it is impossible to measure any influences or effects. However the expert in loudspeaker and low-level signal cable measurements did naturally test the standard parameters. And he issued an excellent report. Audioquest are masters of their trade.

Standard parameters here were the electrical measures of capacity, inductivity and impedance. Well, the art of cable design is to keep all of these as low as possible. That is comparable with asking an engine designer to achieve the greatest possible performance and acceleration with the lowest possible fuel consumption in a car providing the greatest possible comfort. Wiring technicians almost always, for instance, buy low-capacity cable with relatively high inductivity. For the Wild Wood loudspeaker cable Audioquest achieved a fabulous compromise. Technicians will be licking their lips at the one-metre/one-kilohertz figures: very low impedance (4.0 milliohms) and very low inductivity (170 nanohenries) nevertheless leave the capacity (527 picofarads) very much in the green range.

Bill Low, Audioquest founder

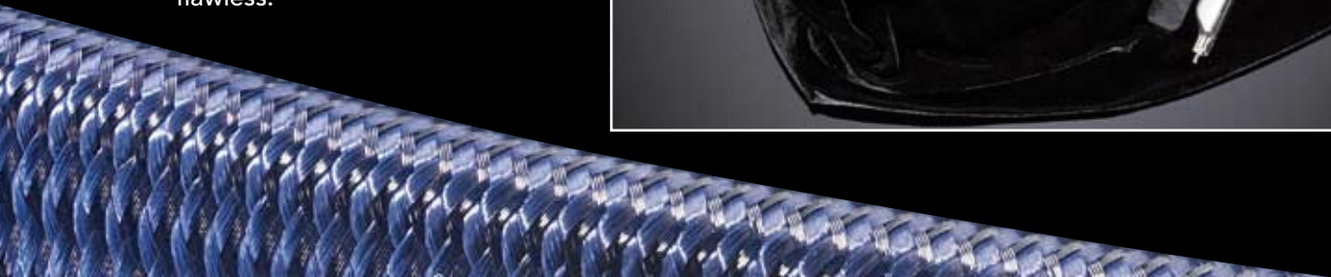
When you experience a DBS cable in action, I hope that you're react just as I did to the first prototypes: "Wow, that sounds good!"

Even connections many metres long will leave your loudspeaker's frequency response, phase response and impedance characteristics totally to themselves. For everything that their loudspeakers are guilty of in terms of discolouration, diffuse reproduction or flagging dynamic range listeners can blame the speakers themselves or the room's acoustics. Even power amps susceptible to vibration – at high levels of cable capacity some sensitive models are inclined towards this form of suicide – ought to be able to confidently live on.

For the Wild Blue Yonder low-level connectors the verdict from the lab was also 'very good'. With low impedance (70 milliohms) and almost ideal capacity (102 picofarads), the inductivity here of 1,220 nanohenries remains at a wholly sufficient low level. Providing that the data from source devices or pre-amp is decent, even five-metre long paths shouldn't tire the music signal. It goes without saying that the Wild Digital's impedance level is better than the required 75 ohms. I left the mains cable out of the testing orgy – I didn't >

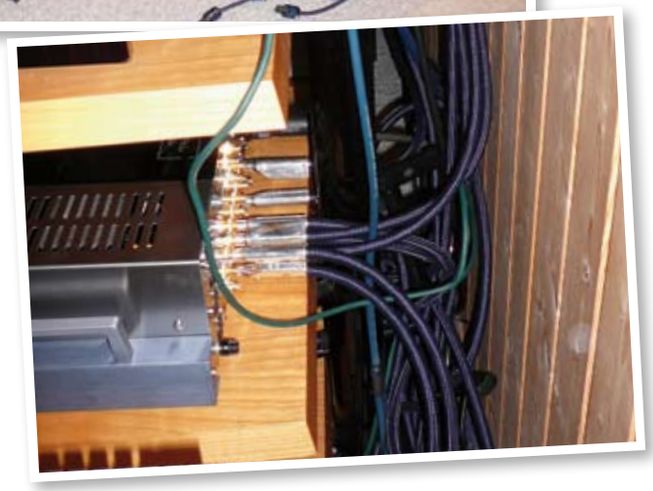
In velvet

Within the outer packaging each Wild cable (pair) lies inside another bag, made of velvet. Each individual jack of the interconnects coax cables is protected by a further pull-on cover. Any fingerprints are wiped away by the polishing cloth included with the cable. The tough, 100-micrometre thick, nickel-free silver coating thus remains constantly flawless.



Green light for 72 volts

The green LED indicates that the DBS system is providing bias voltage.



In the thick of it: in the author's listening room the set waits to be connected (top). Ultimately an august crowd of signal cables behind the pre-amp provide lots of silvery shine in the den (right).

know what could be checked in measurement terms on the 1.8-metre power supplier.

However, anyone connecting up a system using Audioquest cables needs to check they have enough space at the back. For the silver jacks of the already not very supple low-level signal cables project much further out than normal RCA jacks. And they also stick in more firmly – assiduous switching around requires lots of strength and great care if the sockets are poorly secured. Nevertheless the new set-up – or as in my case also the later exchange for different electronics – means a pure gain in listening pleasure. For shortly after the cable set, I also had Octave's Jubilee amplifier (page 22) in my listening room. Octave boss Andreas Hofmann, ill-disposed towards any hocus pocus, paid tribute to the Audioquest connectors for their honesty and drive.

And this could now be really noticed immediately after plugging the cables in – Audioquest has no need to say that the enhanced sound may not be heard right away. After (as is a given for any tester)

In practice

Recabling – How to proceed

Not everyone is likely to have the opportunity to install in one go a complete set of cables worth the price of mid-market car. If you therefore want to go about replacing your old cables step by step with extremely high quality connectors such as those in the Audioquest Wild range, then I recommend that you start with the loudspeaker cables, as these make the greatest difference. Choose a length at least 50 centimetres longer than the minimum you need. That way they will be more flexible in terms of setting things up. Whether these are fitted with cable lugs or banana plugs depends on your power amps and speakers. In the top quality range I was not able to discern any significant acoustic differences between the two types of connectors. If present in your system, you would then replace the low-level signal cable between pre amp and power amp – after all, all of the signals run across this cable as well. I would expect a good dealer to let you borrow expensive cables such as these, as you and your subconscious will need time to differentiate between superficial thrill and genuine audio enhancement. When using cables from serious manufacturers I advocate staying within the 'family' – wildly put together solutions from different companies generally provide a less harmonious overall picture. Base the order in which you replace the bridges between source and pre / power amps on how often you listen to music from the respective sources. Finally replace the power cables, starting with those for the power

Nice and orderly: mains, speaker and low-level signal cables – in groups and sorted by length

amps. These, of course, should not be coming from any cheap extension strip from a DIY store. Above a certain level of quality, whether you ultimately also replace digital connectors is almost a matter of taste. On tone arms I would only change the cable where it is plugged in. Arms with fixed cabling I would leave.

returning a reference set, I had experimented for a long time with various cables. No happy hormones ever got released in the process. Now, however, my anterior pituitary was releasing them freely: finally they were there again, those elements of music playback that lie one level of perception above dynamic range, bass, treble clarity, auditory spaciousness and differentiation. Such as the flow within the music: sometimes calmly supreme in appropriate passages of a Bruckner symphony, then again whirlingly haunting during their mighty climactic moments. If you would like to experience an example of the fascinating skills of conducting genius Wilhelm Furtwängler (Symphony No. 8, The Complete RIAS Recording, Audite/Edel), I recommend listening with electrostats and valve equipment, connected using Audioquest cables.

Or the harmonious interaction of instruments. The incredible beauty of the slow movement in Brahms' Second Piano Concerto as interpreted by Sviatoslav Richter and Erich Leinsdorf (RCA/Sony) seemed totally natural, not least because the extremely subtle sound mixes of pianist and orchestral solos came over in such an unaffected fashion. Or also the emotional power of voices: even in over-produced pop discs, such as Kate Bush's 'The Sensational World' (EMI; now re-released on LP), there are some parts that can bring you to your feet or press you into your seat. For instance in 'Reaching Out', to which the Audioquest cables gave terrific emotive energy to take with it on the way from phono stage to the Martin Logan Summit X speakers. That, then, is the freestyle programme.

Any audio media reviewer's mandatory programme also includes listening to and identifying acoustic differences between CDs and LPs, between remaster generations and in relation to earlier editions. For these tasks the Audioquest products showed themselves to be incredibly precise tools that absolutely nothing seemed to escape. Increased pressure in the upper bass here, dynamic compression in the vocals or sharpening of the hi-hats there – without exaggerating, they showed this all with supreme precision. Anyone therefore who is looking for a warming, softening or diffusing element for their system via the cables is well off the mark going for any Audioquest Wild products.

However, anyone looking for unbridled quickening of the pulse with totally reliable tracking or thrilling musical experiences without any distracting smoke and mirrors is right on the money. The fact that Audioquest has another range even superior to the Wild, the WEL (William E. Low) Signature Series (about 1.8 times more expensive), does not concern me. I did not have the WEL range in my test, so I shall say nothing about it. Of the Wild range, however, I can confidently say: I know of similarly excellent cables – but none better.

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Audioquest
'Wild' cables

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www.audioquest.com

Naturally also part of the 'Wild' range: 'LP' tone arm cable (€2,100 for 1.2 metres) and balanced 'Blue Yonder' XLR connectors (prices as for phonos).

AUDIOphile Profile
The strengths