

FURUTECH

The Absolute Sound – Flux Series Review
January 2014



EQUIPMENT REPORT



Furutech Flux Cables Series

Superb Craftsmanship, Superior Sound

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As anyone who has traveled to Japan knows, the country takes an obsessive pride in both the presentation and packaging of its products. Order a few chocolates as a present and the store's workers may wrap them up in as many as five boxes of increasing size. This attention to detail pays off in ways both large and small. While products from Japan used to attract a derisory snort when I was a little boy, those days, like my childhood, are a long way back. Today Japanese goods are more likely to excite admiration and bit of longing.

When it comes to high-end audio, Furutech's products are a case in point. Furutech has produced a number of innovative components and accessories in recent years, including its impressive LP demagnetizer, which I own and recently reviewed in TAS. Anyone contemplating upgrading wall outlets (yes, it makes a difference) or terminating his own cables also has to consider using Furutech. Its wares consistently exhibit a fit 'n' finish that put many other manufacturers to shame.

So when TAS editor Robert Harley asked if I was interested

in reviewing the company's marquee Flux cable series, I was more than game. So was Furutech, which is to say that it happily volunteered to supply an entire set of cables, not just for my Wilson XLF loudspeakers but also for the Hammer of Thor subwoofers, which are powered by a separate run of interconnects and loudspeaker cables. So we are talking about a fairly hefty commitment here on the part of Furutech, which was apparently confident that its cables would easily meet the test of rewiring my entire system.

In looking at Furutech's technical explanations for its line of cables, the company's confidence soon becomes understandable. Furutech's Graeme Cooley, who is based in Tokyo, gave me the lowdown on how the cables are designed. As he explained it, the cables feature what the company calls Alpha OCC conductors with a double layer of shielding and high-grade polyethylene dielectric with carbon-injected insulating materials. The connectors are finished in layered carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel with rhodium-plated copper conductors. The wire

is cryogenically treated, which, in my view, is always a good thing. Nor is this all. The connectors are also very carefully constructed. They feature nano-sized ceramic particles and powered carbon. A floating field damper—a precisely engineered sprung-metal bridge in the connector body—ties together the metal parts and shunts electrical potentials to ground. Furutech says that this lowers noise by reducing distortion for ultra-clean and stable power transfer. All this is done of course to provide the usual sonic audio goodies: a stable soundstage, superior dynamics, cleaner backgrounds, and—the alpha and omega of the high end—increased resolution.

So what did I get for crawling around on my hands and knees for the good part of an hour extracting and inserting a welter of cables? What I got was a lot of fast, accurate, and exciting sound without any etch or glare. Often cables that seem to offer a speedy presentation can come across as zippy or even, to employ another “z” word, zingy, the kind of sound that causes your body to brace itself before the high notes are even sounded on a recording. That kind of tension is inimical to actually enjoying the music, to letting go emotionally and relaxing, to achieving a state of mind where a grin crosses your face or your thoughts just start going wherever they want to start going. The Furutech cables allowed me to start, in the pithy title of a famous 1956 Miles Davis LP, relaxin’.

This was emphatically the case on Jamaican pianist Monty Alexander’s live recording in 1976 at the Montreux Festival, which has been rereleased on the MPS label at 192/24. I recently snagged a Speaker’s Corner reissue of this famous recording from Chad Kassem’s Acoustic Sounds—the last copy, in fact—but it sounds sensational in either medium. This very dynamic, sizzling recording provides a great test for just about any piece of audio equipment, including cables, because it can move in an instant from a pianissimo to a thundering drum explosion, not to mention Alexander’s own pianistic fireworks, which he can toss off at the drop of a hat, and does.

On the cut “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” for example, the Flux cables really shone. After Alexander jovially quotes from a few bars of this old patriotic song, he and the band cut loose. The cables appeared to deliver every last swish of the drums and percussive effect of Alexander’s piano, where he often likes to dazzle in the upper register with glissandos alternating with stabbing sounds. The cables are so fast it felt like they had the character of a cheetah streaking after its prey. Their transient impact was phenomenal, transmitting the drums and cymbals with a great sense of snap and authority. It was not simply the shimmer of the note that was passed on by the cables, as alluring as that might have been, but also its structure. There is something very satisfying about such resonant decays that add to a profound sense of musical realism, and the Flux cable certainly provided it.

The sense of alacrity of the cables also helped endow the music with greater timbral fidelity. It became simplicity itself to distinguish orchestral instruments, whether it was a bassoon or oboe or clarinet. The mallets striking a vibraphone sound like they were bouncing like a ping-pong ball on top of a table. Any sense of smearing or bloat was absent.

This fine sense of discrimination also manifested itself on classical recordings such as British trumpeter Alison Balsom’s

new CD *Sound the Trumpet*, which features her playing a natural trumpet—one without keys—that has a more sonorous sound than modern trumpets. Together with Trevor Pinnock, the director of the English Concert, she plays a number of beautiful suites and arias by Handel and Purcell. What immediately became evident through the Flux cables was their ability to tease out the individual violin lines of the orchestra. Once again, instead of hearing the orchestra compounded into a congealed mass, it was no chore at all to hear the finely tuned string sections individually. This added to a palpable feeling of liveness and playfulness. It was also possible to hear the very distinct sound of Balsom’s trumpet, the notes emanating from its bore with crisp incisiveness and resounding into the hall. It evoked the days when “Rule Britannia” was something more than an anthem and Britain really was starting to rule much of the globe.

What was my favorite of the Furutech bunch? To be honest, it was in the position where interconnects perhaps make the greatest difference—the phono section—that I was most wowed by the assortment of Flux products. I could say that the Flux sounded “right” but that would not mean very much. What I want to say is this: It was here that I felt Furutech achieved optimal balance between supersonic speed and a full sound. Here the Furutech sounded pretty darn infallible, conveying everything from trumpet to harpsichord with spot-on fidelity, never missing a beat. It was with the loudspeaker cables that I wished for a pinch more of a fuller sound.

I meant what I said above—none of the cables sounds thin or anemic, like they need to go on a protein diet. Far from it. But there was something about the loudspeaker cable that perked up my ears, suggesting that they leaned just a smidgen to the white side of neutrality. That means they will require careful auditioning from anyone interested in the Furutech line.

As always with cables—one of the most contentious products in the high end, given both the monetary stakes and the controversy surrounding technical claims—the Furutech cables will never satisfy each and every audiophile. But I was markedly impressed by their clarity, speed, and transparency. This is one of the very best cables available and another tribute to great Japanese engineering. **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Lineflux interconnect: \$2704/
1.2m

Powerflux AC cord: \$3007

Silver Arrows phono cable:
\$1970/1.2m (DIN-RCA)

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