



360 degree product view

Readers of 'a certain age' will be familiar with the name Colin Wonfor. He is the man who designed the famous Inca Tech amplifiers – among others – and was the chap that introduced gold-plated mains plugs to the audiophile world. Since both those events – back in the 1980s – Wonfor has continued to work in the electronics arena, albeit in a mostly 'behind-the-scenes' capacity, including consulting on some top secret stuff for NASA. Now, though, he has ventured back into the audio limelight as the co-founder of Tellurium Q Ltd., the Somerset-based company that manufactures *"the first HiFi cables designed to successfully combat phase distortion."*

In typical Wonfor style, however, where nothing is ever wholly straightforward, predictable or conventional, there are contentious threads involved here: all the speaker cable bar one have to be terminated at the factory, and the BNC-BNC digital interconnect is an RCA phono-terminated cable with BNC adaptors fitted. Why not simply fit BNC plugs? I asked. "The RCAs with the adaptors sounded better," Wonfor answered. There you are: convention flouted with the answer to the first question I asked!

The Tellurium Q[™] product range currently includes four speaker cables (Blue, Black, Green and Ultra Black), and two strains of digital and analogue interconnects (Blue and Black). The range is sensibly priced: speaker wires start at £19.20/metre for the off-the-reel Blue, and top out with the Ultra Black at £253 a metre, made to length and factory terminated with Z plugs. All the speaker cables have a flat profile, and the Green and Ultra Black feature a broad insulator web separating the pair of conductors. The interconnects cost between £170 and £370 a metre.

The least expensive model in the speaker cable range, the Blue, showed promise straight out of the box before it had had any run-in. In a modest system, consisting of a Naim UnitiQute, an M2Tech Young DAC and a Creek Evolution 5350 integrated amplifier driving NEAT Petite SX speakers, this slim, and easy to install beneath carpeting cable, sounded outstandingly clean and dynamic with no sense of muddle even during complex passages. Instrumental and vocal separation was first class yet the music retained its cogency and fluent presentation. Timing and phrasing were well portrayed, lending the music a rewarding sense that the musicians were truly enjoying playing.

As one progresses through the range the familial 'sound' of these cables and the incremental increase in performance and musical return from one level to the next is impressive. There are no surprises or shocks lying in wait: things just become gradually more tightly focused and sharply defined until one reaches the top-of-the-range Ultra Black, at which point one has reached the current pinnacle of Tellurium Q[™] performance.

That having been said, the £19 a metre, Blue wire is no slouch. For a so-called entry-level cable its performance is rather remarkable, especially its openness and freedom from smear that bedevils most 'starter' level cables. Its sound has an outstanding clarity and focus, along with a fine transparency and, hence, a very natural character on vocals, and equally explicit dynamic compass, note shape and leading edge definition on instrumentation. Best of all, its definition and speed sound entirely natural without any hi-fi spotlighting or artifice. Its inclusion in my office system – a Naim UnitiQute driving Creek CLS20 two-ways – has certainly brightened my working days, allowing me to hear even more of the music that was previously struggling to reach the speakers.

The Ultra Black is the stand-out cable in this foursome, though. Its clarity, though, is alarmingly apparent especially if your system is slightly forward or poorly set up – in which case you will have some corrective work to do before you install the UB. In a well set-up system with a neutral balance, this cable truly excels: it presents music with genuine vibrancy and dynamism from one extreme of the frequency spectrum to the other. As well giving a lucid, vivid portrayal of instruments, voices have exceptional vitality and clarity. This

feeling of 'cleanliness' appears to reinforce the claim that the cable is free from phase distortion. The sound is pristine at the same time as it is earthy and natural. Pitch and timing are both spot on and the music comes across with genuine assertiveness because dynamic contrast seems even more marked when the music does not have to fight its way through a fog of distortion. Some - well recorded - rips demonstrated a previously unheard and quite startling presence, not unlike the effect of firing up the system when one has set the volume to a much higher level than was intended.

Because the Ultra Black is so revealing, those buyers who are not anally retentive about system set-up might be better served by the Green, which, while still clean and revealing, has a more forgiving, slightly gentler nature: one might almost describe it as warmer sounding than the UB, even though it is not warm in the traditional dull, soft and soggy sense.

The final Tellurium Qtm cable to be tested was the £370 BNC-BNC (or, more accurately, phono and BNC adaptor to phono and BNC adaptor) digital cable. This interconnect, designed to complement the revealing Ultra Black speaker cable, exhibits a similar smear- and grain-free sonic character. Its sound has a scrupulous insight that lets you hear exactly how musicians are playing. For example, listening to guitarist Joe Pass playing on his album *Virtuoso* is a true education as you hear him manoeuvre his way through melodies, bass-lines and chord vamps simultaneously to create an impression that he was not playing alone. Which, of course, he was. It is impossible not to be in awe of the man's dexterity when you can hear every individual note he plays as clear as day even at the lightning tempo he uses to fill in the gaps between the notes of the melody (as instructed so to do by his father, who gave him his first guitar as a gift on his ninth birthday. On this 1973 recording, Pass makes today's shred guitarists sound almost pedestrian and their playing inarticulate.) The lucidity of this cable also makes one aware of Pass's genius with chord inversions and progressions. His playing is truly innovative and this cable reveals that fact effortlessly. The Black Digital is rewarding musically as well as being academically insightful. For example, it conveyed the passion of John Hiatt's vocals along with the detail and significance of his and his band's playing – the phrasing and rhythms, in particular, are sublime – on tracks from his masterpiece 1987 *Bring the Family* album. Incidentally, there were no significant musical differences audible when the BNC adapters were removed and cable was connected through the RCA connections on an M2Tech Young DAC and Naim HDX SSD, although the BNC connection sounded preferable to the ears of most listeners being described as "less digital sounding", "fuller-bodied", and "smoother-sounding". I certainly found that it compared favourably with – more expensive – digital interconnects from several well-established manufacturers.

Tellurium Qtm is the first manufacturer to my knowledge to promote the combating phase distortion design of its cables. All I can say is that it seems to be a worthwhile development in cable manufacture and I have now, provided Tellurium Qtm can spare the review samples, adopted the Blue and Ultra Black respectively as my new office system and passive speaker review cables. I would not ask about the six 10-metre lengths I need to wire my reference active system – a £15,180 spend on cables is a little too rich for my tastes at the moment!