

Crystal Cable Ultra cables Not different but ultimate

René van Es

There are many cables and cable brands. Cables can be the icing on the audio cake. But unfortunately they are often used as filters, tone controls or to impress the neighbours. In the end all cables have one single goal, to transport energy with the least possible loss. From wall outlet to your set, between components or to your loudspeakers. It seems so simple, use the principle of Ohm, take a pure conductor, isolate this conductor and hurrah! it works. Indeed it functions. Until you find that different cables sound different. For better or for worse. Other impressions of stereo image or details. The ultimate goal for manufacturers is when the price of the cable goes up, to raise the quality. Without a change in sound. Without bringing offers in neutrality. Whether it involves the cheapest or the most expensive type. What customers want is synergy. Only a handful of manufacturers are able to take that route. Crystal Cable can and it gives the company a unique place in an over crowded market.

Making of Crystal Cable Connect Ultra

To produce the Ultra cables Crystal Cable had to change directions. The conductors for instance are made of very pure silver with added gold. An absolute new technique is used to point all crystals in the cable to the same direction. These crystals no longer form a chaos but are paralleled in the direction of the cable. The so formed alloy is mechanically very strong and shows even on the most sensitive gauges almost zero percent distortion over a frequency range from DC to over 500 kHz. To isolate the conductors Kapton is used, thermal treated to improve properties. The fully balanced cable is insensitive for incoming influences; they are eliminated due to the construction. According to Crystal Cable the improvement against external noise is 60 dB (=1000 times) better between 1 Hz and 50 kHz compared to standard cables and cables of other brands. The Ultra cables are labelled with acrylic plates with unique serial numbers to prevent piracy. Although the conductors are twisted together Crystal Cables are still thin compared to other top interconnects, easy to bend and simple to hide behind your apparatus.

Setup

Take a record player (Garrard 301), a pickup arm (Pro-ject 9C), a cartridge (Benz Micro Glider L2) with a Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo or Standard. Further ingredients are an EAR 834P phono amp. A Lua Cantilena SEL CD player. An Ayon Audio 300B amp connected via Crystal Cable Speak Reference to a set of Focal-JMLab Electra 927 Be speakers. Besides them an Electra SW900 subwoofer. Between the components I switch Crystal Cable power cords (Power Reference against Power Ultra against others) but also between interconnects (Connect Reference against Connect Ultra against other brands). The power is kept clean by use of a Kemp Balanced Source Isolator and a Powersource. Next I carefully choose music on CD and LP to be able to describe what I learned in the past few weeks.

Cables, ughhh

Listening to differences in cables is not my favourite hobby. On the contrary, to keep changing cables behind my set I need gymnastic lessons. Besides the physical duty are results with cables depending on the set they are used in. In the past I learned that Crystal Cable is one of the brands that performs well over a wide range of equipment. With very good results indeed. Believe me, had this not been the case I would not have used them in every single important connection in my stereo setup from the introduction. By now / meanwhile, almost every type of interconnect is used: CrystalConnect Piccolo, CrystalConnect Standard, CrystalConnect Reference and now CrystalConnect Ultra shows up. Used power cords so far are CrystalPower Reference and now CrystalPower Ultra. I will compare the Ultra cables against Reference types. Normally Reference interconnects are used between my phono and integrated amps. And between my CD player and amplifier. Powercords feed these three units. Because I did not have three Powercords Ultra but just two I decided to use them on the amplifier and my tube CD player since they are the biggest power consumers.

Changing power cords asks a lot of our memory and does not give very reliable results. Remember I have to switch off my amp. Change the cord. Wait till the amp has cooled down a bit (minimum of 5 minutes due to tubes), switch it back on and listen again. To avoid this hassle I listened to the Ultra cables for a couple of days before I went back to the Reference types. I noticed some differences with one cable just on the amplifier of the CD player, but they were small, far from shocking. I do notice an important change when I connect both the player and the amp with Ultra power cords at the same time. In this case the sound is more fluid, more natural and easier on the ear. Staging is a bit better in a larger stereo image. The differences one can hear between certain types of Crystal Cables are relatively small but in comparison to a "standard" power cord or even a Läpp Öhlflex cable they are huge. Set on a scale from 1 to 10 you get 3 points in sound quality from a standard cable. With a Läpp cable you reach 5 points, the Reference brings you to 8 points, the Ultra reaches 10 points. The more you use the same brand and type of cable in a set, the more you gain in synergy with a strengthening in positive properties. I notice this once more when I change to Ultra interconnects with the Ultra power cords still in place (of course the improvement on the power site will be noticed still using Reference interconnects). For changing from one interconnect to another there is no need to switch off equipment. So less memory distortion in my head. Therefore I will lead you now through listening experiences using excerpts of music.

Ilona Knopfler goes into the Lua. Mainly because her CD "Live to life" starts with very nice recorded voices. The differences between the Ultra and the Reference are nicely spread out before me. With the Ultra a voice becomes even more fluid. Ilona has more lung capacity to breathe in and out. A background choir has more individuals. The stereo image remains the same, not smaller, just more compact, more a unity. The presentation is taken a step further to become more natural and a step closer to the original recording. Compared to a Reference (top class) the Ultra plays in the super bowl league. Both very good and belonging to the best available in the entire market. The Ultra takes every note just a tiny step further compared to a Reference. I pick Patricia Barber's "Yellow car III" because of the quality of the recorded piano, bass and drum kit. Again I find it illogical to hear every musician more on its own although the band is tighter and more a unity. As if the rhythm is better kept by each individual artist. The bass reaches deeper and is far more intense. Piano is easier to follow against the rest. I do not notice any differences on the drums. I have this strange feeling that every time I change from the Ultra to a Reference, the volume drops. Although I carefully do not touch the volume control and use the same in and output when changing the cables on both sides. Perhaps the volume increase with Ultra is due to an improvement in dynamics, more drama, a less loose presentation and an increase in the height of the stereo image. Third and last CD before I will take you to classical music or LP is the remastered version of "Brothers in arms" by Dire Straits. "Your latest trick" will let you hear the differences very easy. As soon as the Ultra is connected to the amplifier and CD player the image is larger, less flat, deeper and more open than it used to be. Again the impression is more natural, easier on the ear and more fluid. The sax grows and leads. The drumsticks hit the drums more intense. Cymbals come closer. The voice of Mark Knopfler (no family of Ilona as far as I know) is more human. Two interesting points that are connected: tones take longer to fade, when an echo is in the recording you will recognize it better.

Classical music with Jaap van Zweden, playing works of Locatelli. I reverse the order and first use an Ultra cable, then any other interconnect. These steps back make the violin not only smaller but also sharper. A violoncello is less present. The stereo image shrinks; the complete package is simpler and less emotionally involving. To be honest, with many cables I forget reviewing and only listen to this beautiful music. I have to force myself to start my record player and move on. Ask me what it is all about and I will answer you: music! However, fooling around with cables is worth the effort, the Ultra rightly more expensive than a Reference, a cable that goes beyond a Standard etcetera. Still, all Crystal Cables bring music to a very high level. On the other hand if the music grabs you maybe every good setup will do. Feet back on the ground and Chopin playing under my diamond. Claudio Arrau plays virtuous through both Crystal Cables. As soon as I change to Ultra cables I notice on LP again an increase in level. The piano gets larger before my eyes. The orchestra has more superiority over the listener. Hard to put into words what an Ultra cable does exactly compared to for instance a Reference. It is a feeling that will develop within you, it makes you greedy. Emotion or better expression of emotion. I feel the same with a Carpenters album. The Ultra is more smooth, more involved and closer. Gives you recorded children's voices instead of mature voices other cables falsely do. Is cosy maybe the expression I am looking for? If so an Ultra cable is "cosy". Exiting to add to your set and mouth-watering too.

How they do that?

In the many years I write reviews for divers media (and long before) I came across many kinds of interconnects, loudspeaker cables and power cords. Always wondering how much a cable can add or detract. Also amazed how much "sound of its own" a cable can have. Even between cables of the same brand. Amazingly even from type to type. Crystal Cable is a good exception. After playing with these cables for a few years I find more and more that Crystal Cable is as neutral as possible. No own sound, no own colour. Transparent to the bone. If you follow the line up from Piccolo to Standard, via Reference to Ultra, the basic properties of the cable remain the same. What does change is the perception of the listener in terms of details, image, coherence, air, looking for the extremes in frequency spectrum, speed, naturalness and emotion exchange. From the Connect Piccolo up you will enjoy these feelings, coming to the Connect Ultra we reach for the sky. A short time ago some colleagues of mine and I discussed "detail in sound". In my opinion all details are always there during the playback of music. You won't notice them because the set or the cables are incapable to bring you every detail piece by piece. Our ears can hear each detail but our brains ignore the information because it seems unimportant. If the set or the cable ultra is transparent, so that every detail gets proper attention, our brain will respond to it. Play a CD on an ultimate setup, you will hear things you never heard before. Play the same CD on a cheap set and you still hear these details. Now you know what details to listen to, you're drawn to them yourself. What makes Crystal Cable unique is; the more you can or are willing to pay for a couple of cables, the more details will reach the brain although the sound never changes. As if Crystal Cable knows how our ears and brain work. Each part of our audiophile being gets triggered. Resulting in a total impression that grows in musicality, emotion, pleasure, conception and easiness. After the Connect Piccolo/Connect Standard/Connect Reference and Power Reference Crystal Cable does it again. They reach a new standard with the Connect Ultra and Power Ultra. These are delightful, very honest cables. Just better. Not different. That is so clever!

Prices:

Crystal Cable Connect Ultra 1 stereo meter	2499 euro
Crystal Cable Power Ultra 1 meter	1749 euro

Manufacturer:

E-mail: info@crystalcables.com

Web: www.crystalcable.com

Equipment used:

Analogue:

Garrard 301 motor unit (DIY console)

Transrotor puck

Loricraft cork mat

The Funk Firm Achromat mat

Pro-ject 9" carbon fibre arm

Benz-Micro Glider L2 low output MC cartridge

Digital:

Lua Cantilena SEL CD player

Amplification:

Ayon Audio 300B integrated amplifier

EAR 834P phono amp with JJ Electronic ECC803S tubes

Loudspeakers:

Focal-JMLab Electra 927 Be

Subwoofer:

Focal-JMLab Electra SW900 active subwoofer

Power:

Power cords: Kemp, Läpp Öhlflex, Crystal Cable Power Reference and Power Ultra

Mains filtering: Kemp Elektroniks Power Source, Kemp Elektroniks Balanced Isolator Source, separate mains, AHP glass + Neozed fuses

Cables and accessories:

Interlink analogue: Crystal Cable Connect Reference, Connect Ultra, Connect Standard, Connect Piccolo

Interlink subwoofer: Sharkwire

LS-cables: Crystal Cable Speak Reference

Furniture: Spectral Straight TV915, Target VW1 wall bracket
Dampers: Acoustic Analysing TVA dampers