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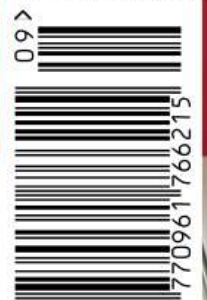
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**SIX PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS BLUE AURA'S
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In Close Proximity



Martin Pipe tries QED's latest mains cable

A more affordable alternative to QED's XT5 IEC mains lead (reviewed in the January 2021 issue) is the recently-launched XT3, which also makes use of the firm's proprietary 'X-Tube' construction. Here, the conductor's copper strands are uniformly-wrapped around a central LDPE (low-density polyethylene) insulator – the 'tube' of the name – instead of merely bunching them together, as is typical practice. The idea is to minimise the proximity effect, a recognised electromagnetic phenomenon in which the impedance of adjacent conductors rises with frequency. Music consists of highly-complex waveforms spanning a range of frequencies, and as a result there is – alleges QED – a kind of subjectively-perceptible



'impedance modulation'. By modifying the spread of current through QED's unusual hollow construction, the effect is reduced.

QED originally developed X-Tube cabling in the 1990s to route audio signals from amplifier to speakers, with no mean success. Since then QED has somehow managed to "specifically tune" its construction for the very different job of carrying power (high voltage, and at a constant 50Hz – as opposed to those intricate 20Hz-20kHz collections of audio frequencies).



Aimed at quality-conscious budget audiophiles and owners of midrange systems, a 1m version of the XT3 – as reviewed here – will set you back £79, or about half the price of the equivalent XT5. It's immediately clear where at least one saving has been made. Although QED has specified the same MK 'Toughplug 655' three-pin plug as fitted to the more expensive model, the IEC C13 plug at the other end of the XT3 is moulded on (and therefore, unlike the XT5's, is not replaceable).

The cable in between is substantial, with a 10.2mm outer jacket diameter, because the X-Tube construction ensures that the constituent PVC-insulated wires within are themselves larger than usual.

That said, only the live and neutral wires – the conductors of which total 1.5 mm² of "99.999% oxygen-free copper" – are 'X-Tubed'. According to QED, the earth has been left alone and is of "conventional geometry" to meet

safety criteria (QED pays a lot of attention to such concerns, and indeed lists the EN standards it complies with).

Yet for all this, the XT3 is fairly flexible and not so heavy it will "lift your amplifier or audio streamer off the floor"!

Although I couldn't get inside the plug at the IEC end of the operation, the 13A plug was rather more accommodating. With its cover removed, I noticed a standard 'lead free' fuse – and that the three wires feeding the plug pins resemble those of the standard (albeit decent gauge)

variety. In other words, there's no obvious evidence of the X-Tube construction

I recall from QED's speaker cables! I contacted QED with my findings, and a plausible explanation was offered. "When the cables are terminated, the LDPE core is 'snipped out' from the stripped end of the wire, so that maximum contact is made to the plug terminal" – there's no longer any plastic in the mix. The conductors are then

immediately obvious, when the XT3 was used to connect the Stereo 200 to the mains, was a surprising improvement in tautness and definition. More texture was evident in the bass-guitar contributions of no fewer than three musicians across Paul Weller's classic Stanley Road album, as well as the synthesised low-end prominent in tracks from Prelude Records' 'Absolutely' disco-funk compilation. This was relative to a bog-standard 2m IEC mains lead; maybe there's something in QED's theory that, although there are many miles of cabling (and several substation transformers) between the power station and my home, the "small cross-sectional area" of the average cable acts, despite its shortness, as a bottleneck when it comes to the "smooth transfer of current to domestic devices".

With preamps, which don't draw as much power, this isn't quite as much of an issue. Yet with the Pre-XR fed with mains via the XT3, I found subtleties and performance space to be more apparent – live Radio 3 concerts on FM (or a high-bitrate stream) are particularly revealing here. I also tried the hires recordings I listened to when I reviewed the XT5 – for example, Emily Palen's Blue Coast outing

"More texture was evident in the bass-guitar contributions of no fewer than three musicians across Paul Weller's classic Stanley Road album"

"twisted together, and screwed into the plug". You'd only see the core (or "rod", as the QED engineer called it) if you cut the cable – somewhat wasteful! – ahead of the plug strain-relief and "peeled it back". On the whole, the standard of construction is very high – even though you can't actually see the 'clever stuff'.

I tried the XT3 with Cyrus's top-of-the-range Pre-XR preamp and Stereo 200 power amp, as reviewed last month, together with Quadral Aurum Wotan VIII floorstanding speakers and various sources both analogue and digital. Something that was

Light in the Fracture and the LSO/ Nosedá recording of Britten's War Requiem – and found that most of the dearer cable's benefits had successfully made the journey. If your amplification isn't integrated, you might need to buy two such cables to achieve the full benefit. However, even then the combined outlay of approximately £160 is less than some are asking for one IEC cable! QED cables benefit from extensive availability, and as a result it shouldn't be difficult to find an XT3 (or two) to try in your own system.

SIZES AVAILABLE

£99 2m and £119 3m versions also available

QED XT3 £79 1M VERSION



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

An IEC mains lead with audible benefits that doesn't cost the earth.

FOR

Clever tech, well-made improvements in impact and detail evident.

AGAINST

IEC plug moulded on.

Q Acoustics
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