



Terms of Reference

Martin Pipe tries a QED interconnect that's both upmarket and affordable.

You can spend many thousands of pounds on a pair of analogue interconnects – the variety that, for example, feeds an amplifier from a DAC or CD player. These artisan products, from relatively-small high-tech specialists, employ exotic materials in all

manner of esoteric designs. We've reviewed plenty of them over the years. They can make a positive difference, but spending £1,500 on a phono cable for a £5,000 system makes little sense; the generally-accepted rule is that 10% of your system budget should be allocated to interconnects, and cables for

mains and speakers. Thankfully, there are options for those of us with more modest hi-fi installations – from larger concerns like Monster, Chord and QED.

The latter, one of the more established names in this field, launched its game-changing 79-strand speaker cable 45 years ago.

Now part of the Armour group, QED has conducted plenty of fundamental research into cables (some of which has been published as the Genesis Reports) and has itself sold some rather sophisticated and exotic products over the years. However, they tend to be affordable – the top range of its current quartet, 'Signature', contains products that sell for less than the entry-level esoterica. Being a large manufacturer, with extensive facilities and

are also subjectively impacted by this electrical characteristic.

This new version of the Reference Audio 40 is marked by QED's 'Analoc2' phono plugs. These use plastic barrels, with pins to make electrical contact with the socket's ground connection; superficially, they resemble (Black Rhodium) Graham Nalty's GN 'Line Contact' plugs. QED assured me that any similarities between these and the Analoc2 plugs – which, unlike the GNs, are twist-lockable – are "purely coincidental". The move from brass to a "high rigidity thermoplastic material" is said to reduce eddy currents. These, according to QED, can "adversely affect the information contained in the audio signal". Said plastic is colour-coded, to identify channels.

QED admitted that the Reference Audio 40 relies on the same red-jacketed coaxial cable of its predecessor...well, if it ain't broke! As with some competitors, ferrites are used to reject the high-frequency interference that can have an "adverse effect...on micro-timing".

More unusual is 'Complementary Conductor Technology', in which your audio signal is simultaneously-carried by two silver-plated OFC conductors of different diameters. Its aim is to provide an "alternative path for the high-frequency audio components" that might otherwise be "time smeared". Separating these conductors from the braid, neatly visible under the jacket in all its herringboned glory, is foamed polyethylene dielectric. This material has a low dielectric constant, thereby helping to keep capacitance low.

Low capacitance? Long-in-the-tooth audiophiles will remember that such a characteristic was essential for CD-4 quadraphonics. And so I inserted the Reference Audio 40 between my Technics SL1200Mk3 turntable, which is equipped with an Audio-Technica AT440MLb cartridge, and my vintage Pioneer QX-949 receiver. I lowered the stylus onto a CD-4 record and all was fine. The receiver's 'radar' lamp lit and the

ensuing playback was tonally full-bodied, with four clean channels of discrete goodness. So QED's claims are evidently of practical merit.

This also shows the Reference Audio 40 is kind to delicate small signals, as well as line-level ones. The cable's substantial screening helps to keep hum at bay – not a trace, even at higher listening levels.

In its intended role, the Reference Audio 40 cannot be faulted. Amongst other things, it was used to interconnect a PC-fed Chord Qutest DAC and ANT Audio Amber 3T headphone amplifier driving HiFiMan Sundara headphones. Relative to a budget cable, more detailing was evident on recordings. I was drawn into the atmospheric proto-fusion of Miles Davis' *In a Silent Way* (in 24-bit, 88.2kHz-sampled hi-res form). In particular the guitar, upper percussion and of course Davis's trumpet were conveyed with crystal clarity – yet master-tape hiss did not intrude.

This classic album isn't known for its activity at the bass end of the musical scale; after switching to London Grammar's *Hey Now* (If You Wait, CD FLAC rip), I found that the prominent bass line got the depth and tautness that makes the track a demo fave.

Next came Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* (Ensemble Signal/Brad Lubman, Harmonia Mundi, CD FLAC rip). Its insistent pace and timing were conveyed well, demonstrating that QED's engineers met another goal. With this recording it was also easy to pick out the textures of the individual instruments – among them strings, pianos, clarinets, marimbas and vibes.

CONCLUSION

It's difficult to fault the Reference Audio 40. QED has used the considerable resources at its disposal to make an analogue interconnect that sounds very good without costing an arm and a leg. The only serious criticism I can make is that it's difficult to tell apart the left and right cables when lighting is subdued – all you have to go by is the colour of the Analoc2 plug's internal barrel plastic (white for left and red for right). These fittings are invisible when the plugs are in position! Top caps of different colour would fix the problem; as things stand, they're both black.

worldwide distribution, clearly has its advantages.

One of QED's most recent additions is the latest incarnation of the well-received Reference Audio 40, a professionally-made and well-packaged analogue interconnect from the range that's a step down from the Signature. As with other QED products, it's priced to reach the majority of audiophiles; the 1m review sample has a £120 price tag. It shares one of the key design goals of its cryogenically-treated £240 Signature equivalent, namely the reduction of capacitance between outer screen and inner signal core. As well as its provable effects on high-frequency performance, QED claims that tightness and rhythm

QED REFERENCE AUDIO 40 £120 1M VERSION, AS TESTED

(£100 0.6M AND £150 3M VERSIONS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE)



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

A high-end stereo analogue phono interconnect that everyone can afford.

FOR

- very well made
- plugs will 'lock' to the sockets of your equipment
- smooth, detailed, balanced and engaging presentation

AGAINST

- difficult to identify left and right cables when lighting is poor

QED
bit.ly/3vmsqsj