


# Equipment Reviews

## Furutech NCF Booster Cable Holder

Details

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I've said it before: No matter what type of audiophile you are, Furutech probably makes a product you've lusted after. In addition to power distributors and filters, and finished interconnects, speaker cables, and power cords, they make DIY bulk cables and component parts, and accessories that include the stainless-steel and silver-plated FI-50 NCF power-cord connectors, the Destat III Static Charge Eliminator for LPs and CDs, the DF-2 LP Flattener, Nano liquid contact enhancer and PC- $\alpha$  (Alpha) cleaning solution for CDs, the SK-III Electrostatic brush for discs and A/V gear, and a variety of AC outlets, cover plates, and fuses.

Furutech designed the new NCF Booster cable holder (\$350 USD) in response to frequent customer requests for a product that could physically support a heavy audiophile power cord. In the company's own words, the Booster is a "multi-material, hybrid constructed . . . Performance-enhancing Connector & Cable Holder" that provides "superior damping."

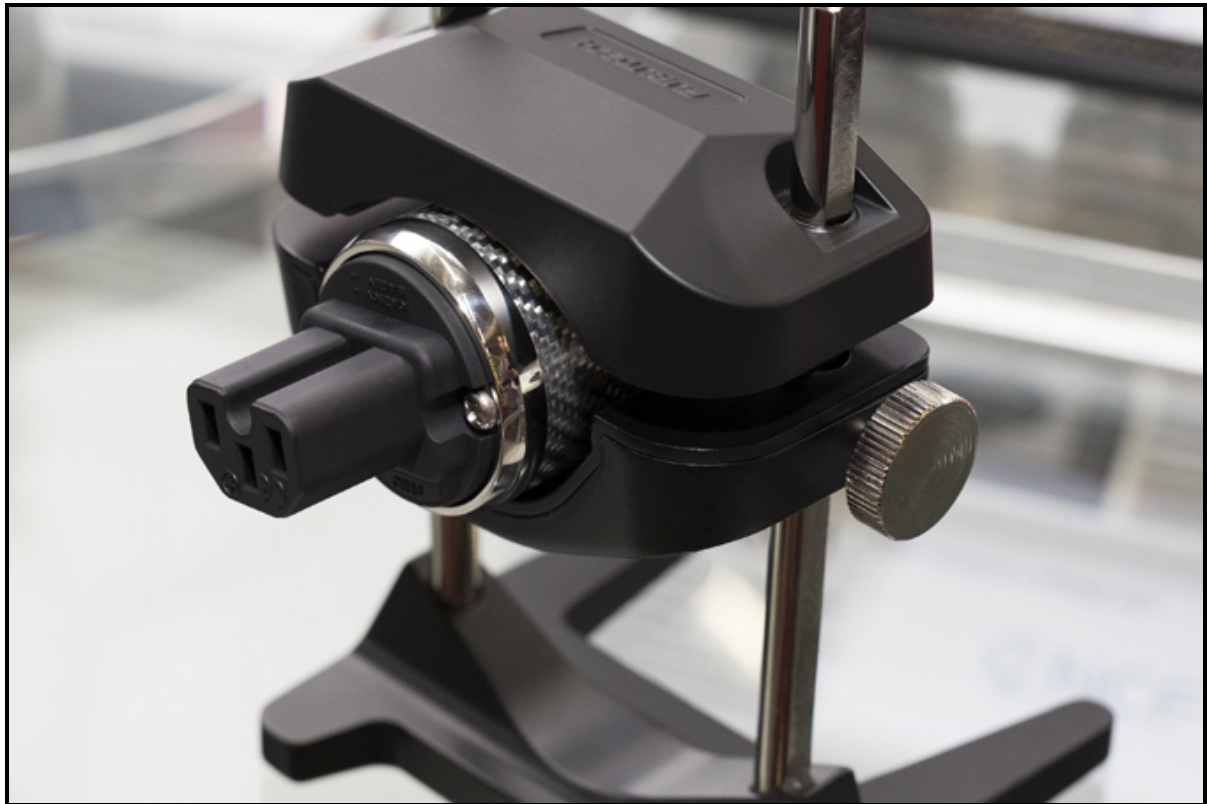


The NCF Booster seems both unique and ingenious, and Furutech claims that it increases performance in several ways. First, as a clamp, it secures a power cord's male or female connector, to damp the connector and reduce the chance that it will become misaligned when connected to a component or wall outlet. Second, as a lifter, it holds interconnects, cables, and power cords above the floor, which is claimed to increase a system's sound quality by reducing electromagnetic interference. Third, in either capacity, the NCF Booster subjects the cable or cord to Furutech's active Nano Crystal<sup>2</sup> Formula (NCF), which is claimed to further improve performance.

Known as one who is not shy of tweaks, I wasn't surprised when SoundStage! publisher Doug Schneider brought the NCF Booster to my attention. Nor is it surprising that I find the NCF Booster an interesting product. The problem of heavy audiophile power cords that strain and/or wrench loose from their IEC connectors is one I have tried for years to alert audiophiles to.

### **Tall, dark, and adjustable**

Each NCF Booster comprises: 1) a base; 2) two 2.75"-tall, nickel-plated, brass-bottomed poles; 3) two 2.75"-tall extension poles; 4) a large, height-adjustable clamp in two pieces, its inner surfaces serrated to grip a cord or cable, its two halves sliding up and down the poles, and locked in place at the desired height with two large, knurled, hand screws at the sides; and 5) two optional silicone rings that wrap around the poles and hand screws, the rings' elasticity providing additional damping of the cord's connector.



When a cord's connector is inserted in the NCF Booster, the connector is damped not by the tightening of screws, but by the weight of the clamp's heavy top piece -- it weighs 0.62 pound (280gm) -- and the force of the rings, if used. The clamp's bottom half weighs only 0.18 pound (80gm).

The base of the NCF Booster is a heavy plate of silicone-covered steel with an outer layer of acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) resin. A hard, expensive polymer, ABS is also an excellent electrical insulator. The clamp's top half is a block of cryogenically treated and demagnetized stainless steel covered by NCF-treated crystalline resin. Furutech says that this resin has two active properties: 1) It generates negative ions through a piezoelectric process that eliminates static, and 2) it transduces, or converts, thermal energy into frequencies in the far infrared (i.e., at the high end of the infrared bandwidth of light). Furutech combines the resin with nanoscale particles of ceramic and carbon powder, the latter said to possess properties of thermoelectric damping. The clamp's bottom piece is made of the ABS and NCF resins.



If you need to raise the NCF Booster higher than is possible with the included poles, Furutech sells a set of ten extension poles for \$34.

With just its stock poles, the NCF Booster is a tad under 9”H. Its base is about 3.6”W x 3.9” deep, the clamp 3.5”L x 1.6”W. In total, with the included pair of extension poles installed, the NCF Booster weighs slightly less than 1.5 pounds. It comes with a one-year manufacturer’s warranty.

Furutech states that the NCF Booster has already been such a success that, later this year, they’ll release a version for signal cables (e.g., RCA, XLR, HDMI, USB), with flat upper and lower clamps for securing those types of connectors.

### **Have NCF Booster, cord won’t travel**

Furutech sent me three review samples of the NCF Booster. Removing them from their boxes revealed heavy objects perfectly crafted of impressive materials: classic Furutech build quality.

Assembly was simple, accomplished in just a few steps using the included 2.5mm hex wrench. Use of the silicone damping rings is optional, but Furutech says that some customers have reported audible improvements with them in place. I tried the Boosters with and without the rings.



In my big system, I used the NCF Boosters with the power cords that run into the AC outlet, SACD/CD player, and digital-to-analog converter, clock, music server, amplifier, preamplifier (which has two power cords), subwoofers, subwoofer crossover, and the active bass modules of my speakers. In my secondary system, I used the Boosters on cords that run into the AC outlet, active bookshelf speakers, DAC's external power supply, and subwoofer. In both systems, I generally left the first NCF Booster on the respective AC outlet, and swapped the other two among the various electronic components and speakers. For the electronics, I placed the Boosters on either my racks or vibration-control platforms. For my subwoofers and active speakers, I placed the Boosters on the floor or shelf, as appropriate.



Because my big rig's AC outlet is more than a foot above the floor, I had to use several sets of extension poles to properly position the first NCF Booster. It was at that point that I discovered a problem: the outlet holds two power cords, one each from my power conditioner and grounding block. Unsure how to proceed, I contacted Furutech, who recommended that I use one NCF Booster to clamp the power cords' male connectors together, with the clamp's top piece over one connector, and its bottom piece under the one below.

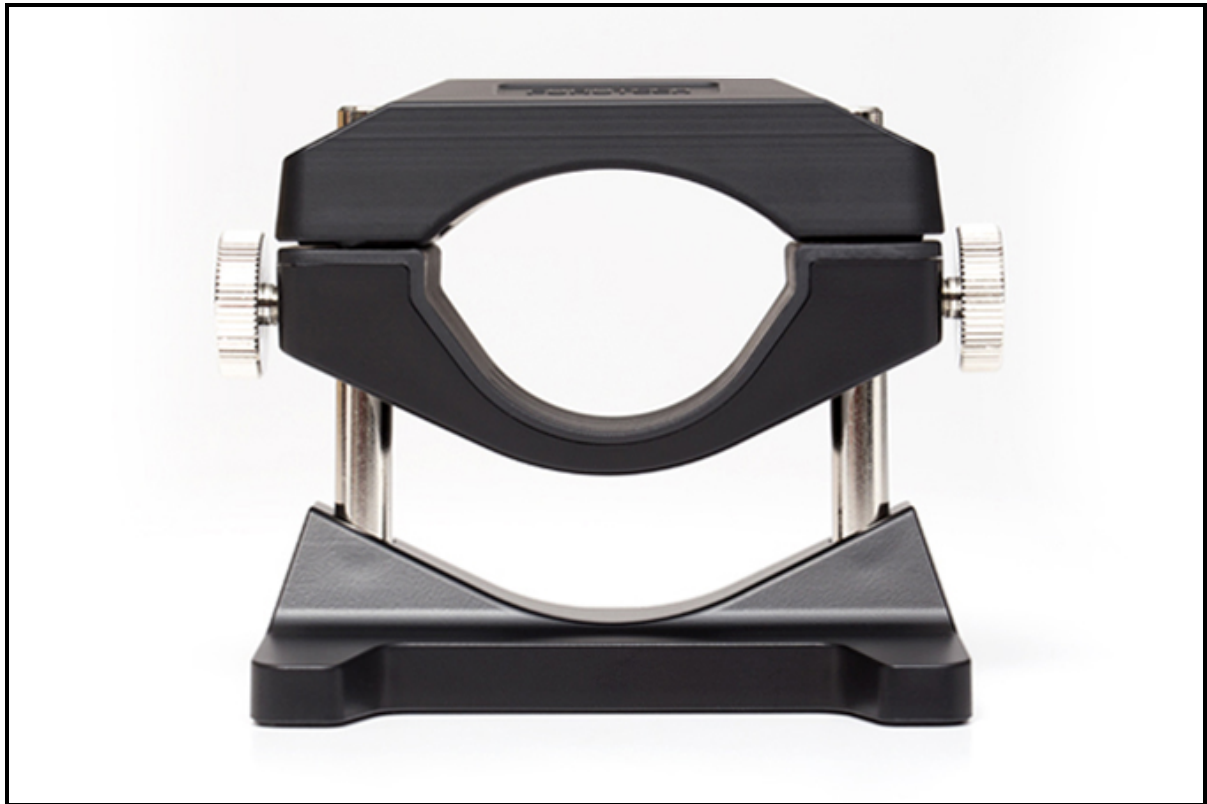
However, as shown in the photo below, my big rig's wall outlet is horizontally oriented -- there wasn't enough space between the NCF Booster's poles to allow it to clamp both or even one of the connectors. I consulted with Furutech again. The result: I left the power conditioner's cord in the outlet, and moved the grounding block's cord into a power strip plugged into the conditioner.





Prior to setup, I'd suspected it possible that some of my components and speakers might present a challenge, particularly when the NCF Boosters were used as power-cord connector clamps. I was certain, for example, that the large heatsinks that protrude from the rear panels of my JL Audio Fathom v2 subwoofers would prevent the Boosters from clamping those cords' connectors. However, with one unusual and easily remedied exception, I had no such problems -- more than enough of the JLA subs' connectors were exposed for the NCF Boosters to grip them.

The only components that did present a setup challenge were Esoteric's A-03 and Grandioso S1 power amplifiers, the rear panel of each of which includes a small, removable aluminum shelf that physically supports the power cord. The shelf does its job well -- these amps' cords have never become loose, and connector strain has been visibly decreased. When I tried the NCF Booster with the Esoterics, I easily solved this problem by removing each amp's shelf.



There was also no shortage of places to try the NCF Boosters as cable risers. I tried them in numerous spots in my big rig, supporting my Synergistic Research speaker cables, interconnects, and power cords.

### **A vitamin NCF boost**

Used in my system as power-cord clamps, at first with the silicone rings in place, the NCF Boosters' effects were immediate and unmistakable, particularly with digital sources, but were audible pretty much everywhere: greater transparency, faster transients, sharper focus, greater solidity, more detail, less noise; overall, music sounded more refined, less grating.

The first movement of Schubert's String Quartet No.14 in D Minor, D.810, "Death and the Maiden," dramatically begins with simultaneous bowing on all four instruments. With the NCF Boosters in place, the bowing of the Quartetto Italiano (SACD/CD, Decca/Esoteric ESSD 90170) had more focus, less distortion, and cleaner leading edges.





A 1997 remastering of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, with Gianandrea Gavazzeni conducting the Milan La Scala orchestra and chorus, recorded live in 1957 (16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC, EMI Classics 5099908297), is not the best-sounding opera recording. Among other things, it suffers from hollow-sounding voices. In "Regina! . . . Duolmi l'amaro incarco," the NCF Boosters added solidity, refinement, and smoothness to the voice of soprano Maria Callas, and revealed more of her trademark tonal edge, which, if not traditionally beautiful, evinced a profound mastery of vocal craft.

*Stills Alone* features Stephen Stills's voice and acoustic guitar, often with little or no instrumental accompaniment (16/44.1 FLAC, Vision/Gold Hill 3323). With "Treetop Flyer," the NCF Boosters revealed a "darker" background that improved the tonal shading and color vibrancy of his guitar notes.

In "My Home Is in the Delta," from Muddy Waters's only acoustic album, *Folk Singer* (CD, Chess LPS-1483), the perfectly timed silences between the Mud's guitar notes are said by many to contain or express this performance's emotional power. With the Boosters, those silences were even more complete and the surrounding notes less distorted. The intimacy and poignancy of this recording were increased.



The NCF Boosters allowed great recordings, such as *Stills Alone* and *Folk Singer*, to sound even better. But they also greatly benefited many poor recordings -- not only *Anna Bolena*, but many brightly recorded rock albums from the 1970s and '80s. I love progressive rock, so this was a godsend. The Boosters added significant focus and cohesiveness to the 2003 reissue of Yes's *Relayer* (16/44.1 FLAC, Rhino R2-73792), and the 2017 remastering of Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Works Volume 1* (16/44.1 FLAC, BMG 46) -- the very things that these albums, and many other ones from the prog era, lack.

I appreciated the effects of the NCF Boosters just as much in my second system, where they brought the same benefits mentioned above -- things that are often very welcome with lower-priced gear. Perhaps not surprisingly, the improvements effected by the Boosters were in many ways similar to those I've gotten from other products made with Furutech's NCF material -- e.g., their FI-50 NCF power-cord connectors, which are extremely well made and damped.

Removing the NCF Boosters caused my systems to revert to their prior sound qualities, which were relatively coarser, with less focus, refinement, and smoothness. Without the Boosters, the sound of even my main system, which I've long considered a paradigm of precision and refinement, now sounded to me somewhat splashy, hollow, and imprecise.



But removing the NCF Boosters from my systems also made me realize that, in creating a tighter, more focused sound, the use of all three Boosters ever-so-slightly closed things in, likely by both reducing noise and excess reverberations, and damping the power cords' conductors. That effect was only very slightly ameliorated when I removed the silicone rings. Particularly in my big rig, with its uncommonly spacious sound, guitar notes in Stephen Stills's "Treetop Flyer" and in Muddy Waters's "My Home Is in the Delta" had just a tad less spring and zip.

Sometimes I missed that openness. But to be fair, I've tuned my systems to have an exciting, highly reverberant sound. While many visitors have been gobsmacked by that sound, a few, mostly professional musicians, believe it to be unrealistic. The NCF Boosters might, therefore, simply be causing my systems to sound more like live music, and less like something reproduced by audiophile gadgetry.

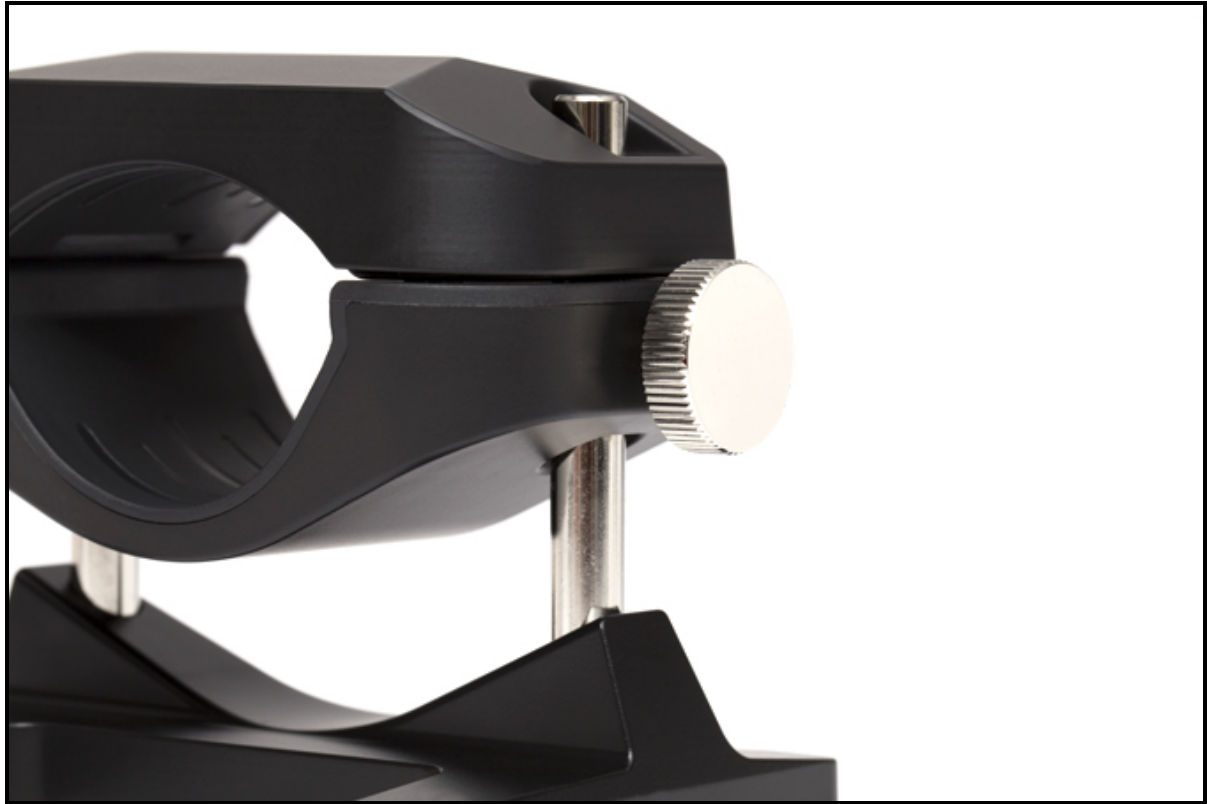
There may be some audiophiles who, like me, feel that the NCF Boosters' slight reduction of resonances, if it occurs at all in their system, may be only a venial sin. However, I suspect that most will relish the benefits the Boosters provide. I found it quite easy to hear the refinement, transparency, retrieval of low-level detail, focus, and cohesion they could bring to even an excellent audio system.



As a seasoned audiophile tweaker, I've been to this dance a number of times before, most recently when auditioning Telos Audio Design's RCA and XLR Quantum Caps. They, too, revealed greater solidity and refinement in the sound. However, when I used the Telos caps on too many of my components' connectors, the sound got a bit too closed in. Of course, I would prefer to have the refinement and focus and an open, resonant sound. But in the world of audio tweaks, those two sets of qualities can often be mutually exclusive.

As with the Telos Caps, I wouldn't start by clamping all of my power cords with NCF Boosters. Start with one or two, then add more as desired. There appears to be a reason that Furutech sent me only three Boosters for my extremely complex system; their effects are powerful, and generally, it's easy to overdamp a system -- I speak from experience. As with many tweaks, your taste, system, and recordings -- in short, your ears -- will tell you when you've properly balanced the sound.

Nor would I assume that optimal use of the NCF Boosters necessarily includes the silicone rings. My guess is that, in addition to the above factors, their effects will at least partly depend on the power cords used.



Finally, using all three NCF Boosters as cable and power-cord risers with my Synergistic Research speaker cables brought many of the above sonic benefits -- though less than when I used the Furutechs as power-cord clamps -- and with less reduction in openness.

**“It isn’t that they cannot find the solution. It is that they cannot see the problem.” -- G.K. Chesterton**

Kudos to Furutech for inventing the NCF Booster, a new and very effective type of tweak and a solution to the long-neglected problem of heavy audiophile power cords becoming misaligned with, or even straining or breaking, IEC outlets. Add to that the sonic benefits brought by Furutech’s Nano Crystal<sup>2</sup> Formula and the Booster’s unique damping design, and you have what’s surely to be another popular accessory from Furutech.

. . . Howard Kneller

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### **Associated Equipment (System 1)**

- **Amplifiers** -- Esoteric A-03 and Grandioso S1
- **Preamplifiers** -- Esoteric C-02X and Grandioso C1
- **Sources** -- Three-box Windows 10 music server with JPlay player, Linn Kazoo control software, JCAT USB and Ethernet cards, JCAT USB Isolator, HDPLEX 200W linear

power supply, and iPad Mini 3; Esoteric Grandioso K1 SACD/CD player and Grandioso G1 Master Clock Generator

- **Other electronics** -- JL Audio CR-1 active subwoofer crossover
- **Speakers** -- YG Acoustics Kipod II Signature
- **Subwoofers** -- JL Audio Fathom f113 v2 (2)
- **Interconnects** -- Synergistic Research Galileo UEF
- **Digital links** -- Synergistic Research Galileo LE USB and Galileo BNC digital, JPlay JCAT USB
- **Speaker cables** -- Synergistic Research Galileo UEF
- **Power cords** -- Synergistic Research Galileo UEF and Atmosphere Level 3
- **Power conditioners and distributors** -- Synergistic Research PowerCell 12 UEF SE and QLS power strips
- **Isolation devices** -- Silent Running Audio VR fp Isobase, Symposium Acoustics Osiris Ultimate and Standard racks and Segue Platform and Roller Block Series 2+ equipment support system, Synergistic Research Tranquility Bases and MIG 2.0s
- **Room treatments and correction** -- Synergistic Research Acoustic Art System and HFT and FEQ room treatments
- **Misc.** -- f.oq damping tape, Hi Fidelity MC-0.5 Magnetic Wave Guides, Mad Scientist Black Discus Audio System Enhancer, Synergistic Research Grounding Block, Telos Quantum connector caps, WA-Quantum Quantum-Sound-Animator

### **Associated Equipment (System 2)**

- **Electronics and speakers** -- Channel Islands Audio linear power supply, M2Tech Evo 2 DAC, System Audio Saxo 5 active speakers
- **Subwoofer** -- JL Audio d110
- **Subwoofer interconnect** -- Synergistic Research Core UEF 2
- **Digital link** -- Synergistic Research SynTos TosLink
- **Speaker cable** -- Synergistic Research Core UEF 2 (single channel between active speakers)
- **Power cords and conditioners** -- Synergistic Research Core and PowerCell 12 UEF SE
- **Misc.** -- Black Discus Audio System Enhancers, Symposium Ultra Platform under PowerCell

### **Furutech NCF Booster Cable Holder**

**Price: \$350 USD; set of ten extension shaft bars, \$34 USD.**

**Warranty: One year parts and labor.**



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