

FURUTECH

HiFi Choice (UK) – Reference III Review

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Audio Reference III 1.2m interconnect,
RCA (£1,155); XLR (£1,320); Speaker
Reference III speaker cable, 3m pr (£1,575)
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Furutech

Reference-Series III-NI

Luxury hi-tech audiophile cables from Japan that make a real connection with the music

When naming the three most important factors to consider when choosing cables, the answer is a simple mantra. Sound Quality, sound quality, and, last but not least, sound quality. Cables allow us to 'fine tune' the sound of our hi-fi set-ups, ensuring we achieve an end result that pleases the ear – a bit like adding seasoning to food to make it taste better.

Or is it? A very different school of thought says a good cable simply acts as a pure neutral conduit – neither adding nor subtracting from the original signal. While this is an admirable concept – textbook 'high fidelity' – it's surprisingly difficult to define. How, for example, can one be totally sure nothing's being added or subtracted?

Furutech's approach to cable design and manufacture is a very high-tech one. Its Reference-Series III-NI cables feature Double-shielded Alpha-OCC Conductors to eliminate radiated noise and Formula GC-303 Antimagnetic EMI-Absorbent Modules around each cable – those 'blocks' near one end.

Beautifully engineered rhodium-plated RCA or XLR connectors are a given. The centre pin of Furutech's RCA plug looks like a stranded cable, rather than a solid piece – and is described by Furutech as 'a high-contact work of engineering art composed of nonmagnetic rhodium-plated phosphor bronze with Teflon dielectric'.

If nothing else, this should ensure a much better/cleaner contact. The RCA connector itself has a backbone composed of non-magnetic rhodium-plated eutectic-cast brass with a non-magnetic brass outer locking shell. XLR pins are made from luxuriously finished non-magnetic rhodium-plated phosphor-bronze for superior contact.

Shielding is very important, so Furutech Reference cables feature two. Shield 1 has a 0.12 mm Alpha conductor wire braid. Shield 2 features 'special EMI-absorbent Formula GC-303 Modules for superior noise isolation'. The insulation employs air-foamed HDPE to reduce capacitance.

Furutech claims these things result in greater resolution and increased clarity. Dynamics are more powerful, while at the same time there's an 'ultra-quiet soundstage that allows the music to develop more fully without artificial upper-frequency 'presence region' glare'.

Each Alpha Conductor is composed of Fine OCC Wire Strands treated with Furutech's Alpha Cryogenic and Demagnetizing Process. Clearly, the attention to technical detail is very impressive and the sonic results hopefully speak for themselves.

SOUND QUALITY

And the Furutech sound? Impressively clean and very focused, with excellent detail and clarity. The music sounds crisp and fairly lean, tonally – it's not a lush 'romantic' sort of presentation. There's no sense of the sound 'spreading'; the impression is one of focussed concentration and neutrality – nothing added, nothing taken away.

As mentioned, Reference Series cables use an aluminium box containing a ferrite-type material that absorbs RF noise – the grandly named Formula GC-303 Antimagnetic EMI-Absorbent Modules. We reckon this is a key design detail that determines the unusually 'solid' sound produced by these cables.

There's a welcome reduction in high-frequency 'hash', resulting in a sound that's notable for its cleanness. We especially noticed this with the loudspeaker cables. The Furutech cables replaced a set of expensive silver solid-core types and resulted in a clearly audible improvement – we sorely missed these cables when they went back!

Directionality? For optimum sound, Furutech recommends having the aluminium box closest to the source component, but sonically, the 'directionality difference' isn't huge. Given extended use, cables tend to 'burn-in' and settle down so that the sound becomes optimum in the direction that happens to be being used.

Quite apart from their excellent sonic qualities, build quality was the other impressive thing about the Furutech cables covered here. Part of a reviewer's lot is the almost constant need to evaluate new equipment. This involves regular plugging/unplugging of cables, and it causes much wear and tear. Many audiophile cables are thick, heavy, and inflexible.

"Enjoy exceptionally solid build and quite excellent sonic qualities"

Regular swapping of cables leads to strain at key points and may result in fractures. In extreme cases, the cable may go open-circuit and cease to function. But, usually, the result is simply a drop in performance.

In such cases, a cable may be working, yet operating below its proper level. The sound will be slightly impaired without your being aware there's something's wrong. It's only when you replace the damaged cable with one that's working properly that you'll realise something was lacking.

Furutech cables feel like they're built to last and able to stand up to the strain of being plugged/unplugged better than most. In particular, the Reference-Series III-NI speaker cable impressed us with its exceptionally solid build quality – specifically the termination of the spade connectors and the way these join to the main cable.

Jimmy **Hughes**

