

SPEAKER CABLES

VAN DEN HUL INSPIRATION HYBRID

True to the music

AJ van den Hul, doyen of the hi-fi cable world and a living legend when it comes to some of the very finest, hand-built phono cartridges in the world, is one of those relentless souls who just keeps on coming up with new ideas – and better still, ideas that work.

The Inspiration speaker cable is a case in point. Part of Van den Hul's Fusion cable series, it employs an all-new conductor type.

Unique conductors are very much at the core of Van den Hul's design philosophy. Be it silver, gold, pure copper or linear carbon, Van den Hul has tried them all, and found ways to turn their properties into sonic benefits.

The Fusion Series conductor fuses (excuse the pun) three different metals: zinc, silver and copper. This threesome is combined in a vacuum oven, where the metals are evaporated and combined using a strong electrical focusing field.

The process yields a wire 150 microns thick, but that's not the end of the story. Ultra-high inductive heating is applied to the wire to achieve absolute fusion of the three metals, followed immediately by rapid cooling. The result is what Van den Hul describes as an amorphous alloy – a substance with a glass-like atomic structure and no crystalline content.

The latter is the key objective of the process, because Van den Hul believes in creating a signal path totally unencumbered by crystalline obstacles. These, he says, are responsible for sonic artefacts such as harshness and harmonics.

Fusion-series conductors don't suffer from these impurities, and achieve maximum musical resolution, he claims. The three-metal alloy employed here is a first in the cable universe, and one that will have made some of Van den Hul's rivals sit up and take notice.

The Inspiration Hybrid speaker cable is one of the first products to employ the Fusion-series alloy. It's a twin-lead design, which also makes it suitable for bi-wiring or bi-amping applications.

Each lead contains 98 strands of the Fusion triple-metal alloy conductor with a combined cross-section area of 1,97 mm², embedded in a layer of linear-structured carbon. It is protected by a heavy, braided screen with a cross-section area of 4,45 mm² which should be grounded on the amplifier side, but left disconnected on the speaker end.

• p e a k s •

VERDICT

Accurate without resorting to clinical analysis, the Inspiration is a liquid performer that always treats the music with deference.

PRICE..... R1 560 (unterminated)

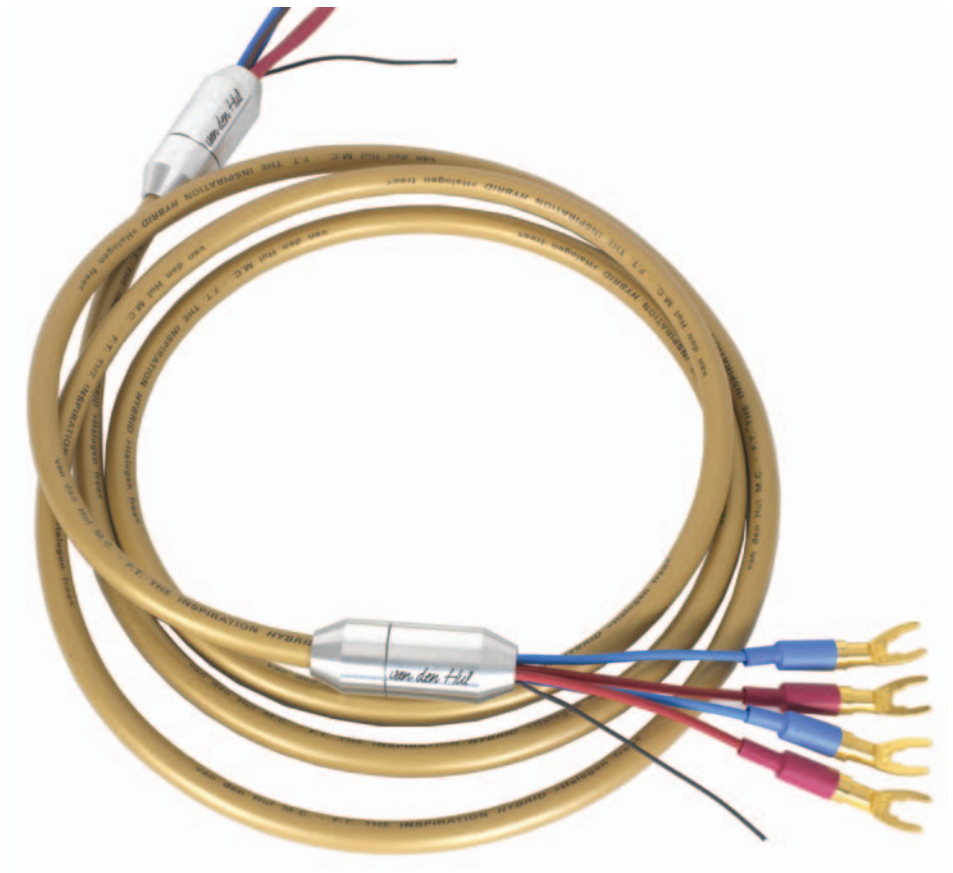
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Finally, the usual halogen-free Hulliflex insulating jacket provides a final layer of protection.

New in the Van den Hul context is a separate grounding lead, which allows a direct earth connection between the amplifier and compatible loudspeakers – Van den Hul quotes Tannoy's Dimension TD8, TD10 and TD12 as examples. It is said to further reduce radiated electromagnetic noise to lower the noise floor and up overall clarity.

The Inspiration Hybrid speaker cable is fairly flexible and easy to work with, thanks to a reasonable 11,5 mm diameter. Rated impedance is 1,4 ohms per 100 m, and capacitance comes to 318 pF/metre.

The review sample came supplied with Van den Hul Orchid single-ended interlinks, which the local supplier believes to be a perfect match for the Inspiration. And indeed, the Van den Hul cables generally prefer to consort with each other, rather than having to deal



with alien models from other marques.

Be that as it may, I ended up using the Inspiration in conjunction with both the Orchid and some of my regular references, including Nordost Frey, XLO Reference and Van den Hul The Second. Speaker cables employed for comparison included XLO Signature, Naim's NACA5, and some old Kimber 8TC.

The Inspiration was used to hook up a pair of Vivid Audio VI.5 speakers to my trusty Marantz MA-22 monoblocks for much of the review, but I also used the Sugden A21a and the PrimaLuna ProLogue One amps reported on elsewhere in this issue.

As far as I'm concerned, a cable or an interlink should ideally be completely transparent, showing off the talent of the hardware it is coupled to, rather than overtly contributing to the overall sound. Yes, I know that tweekers (myself included) use cables to tailor the sound of a system, but that's not really what they're supposed to do.

If AJ van den Hul's objective was to create a thoroughly transparent cable that doesn't get in the way of the music, and in fact seems to open the

curtains to a new world of unencumbered sound, then the Inspiration succeeds more than admirably.

The cable offers little in the way of its own sound: it doesn't attenuate treble or boost bass response, nor does it impose a specific sonic signature. Instead, the cable does exactly what Mr Van den Hul claims: it provides a smooth, efficient conduit for the music delivered from the source component via the amplifier to the speakers.

You only realise how neutral the cable is, and that it is able to get out of the way of the music completely, rather than trying to influence it, when you compare it to other cables. There's a certain liquid freedom, an easy impetus and a new-found energy to the music that simply wasn't noticeable before.

If there's more bottom-end extension (which there is) then it's not because a particular sub-bass frequency point is emphasised, but because more of the audible bandwidth becomes available. And if fine slivers of detail are suddenly more apparent (which they are), it's because they haven't been lost in the signal

transfer process.

In all, the Inspiration sounds smooth, clear, detailed and seamless. Or rather, it allows the music to sound as it should: smooth, clear, detailed and seamless.

The cable certainly allows more of the original signal to reach the speakers, and as a result, the end product is more compelling, and more enjoyable.

That's the best part: because the cable isn't working to boost or attenuate anything, because it sounds so natural, there's absolute nothing fatiguing about the listening experience. You simply go with the music's flow, and find that the hours simply fly by in a flurry of sonic enjoyment.

Mr AJ van den Hul knows his cables, and his science. The Inspiration may well turn non-believers into disciples of the cable art. It won't work miracles, but at least, this speaker cable will ensure that more of what goes in eventually reaches your ears. And that's no mean feat.

Deon Schoeman

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