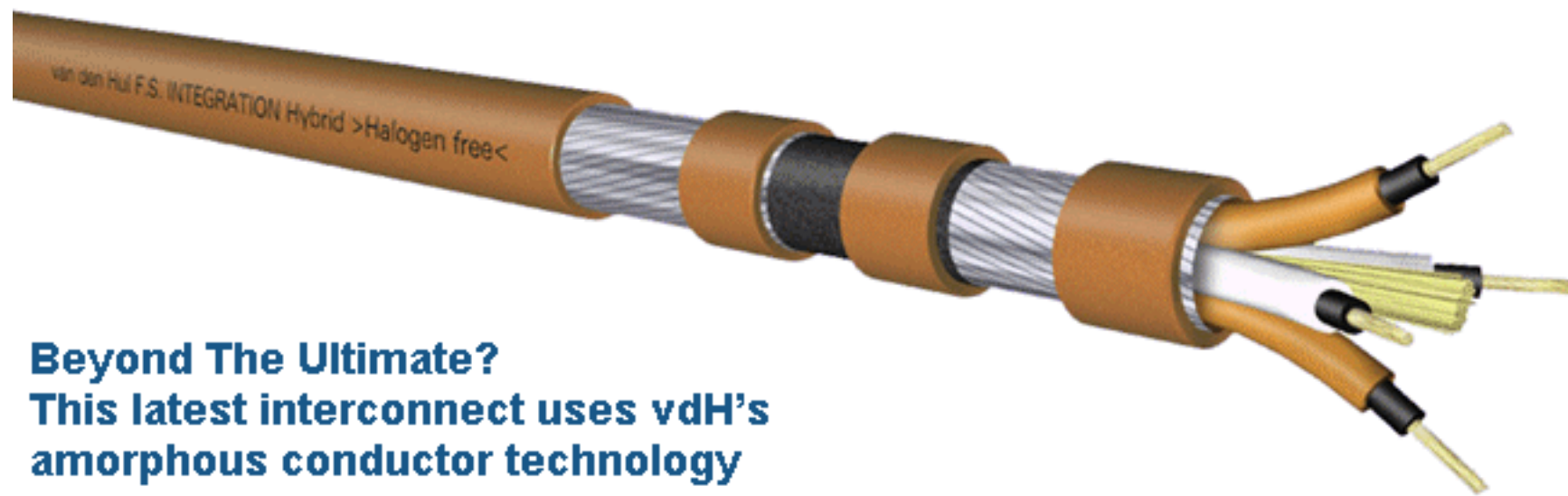


van den Hul Integration



Beyond The Ultimate?
This latest interconnect uses vdH's
amorphous conductor technology

Brass is an alloy which has had little success in specialist audio. Some critics have described its sound as, well, 'brassy.' But now, AJ van den Hul believes that he has rewritten the rules by introducing subtle alterations to the composition of the metal, and has used a form of brass for the conductors in the integration — a new cable which follows the upgrade of van den Hul's all-carbon The First to First Ultimate.

This new alloy sees a precise addition of silver to the usual copper and zinc. A low crystal count in the conductor is a key aspect of vdH cables, but common brass is a highly crystalline alloy. So here, vdH makes use of a costly vacuum deposition process that constructs the alloy in an amorphous state, devoid of crystalline boundaries. Amorphous substances have radically different characteristics at magnetic domain and quantum level, and it's here that the particular qualities of the new conductor are believed to reside.

The alloy is then drawn into stranded, silver-plated conductors which are built, rather like van den Hul D102, into a balanced twisted pair cable with a low-loss dielectric, using a semiconducting carbon 'Hybrid' inner jacket and a low-impedance woven copper braid. This cable comes with either single-ended or XLR balanced terminations (the price is the same for either; 0.8m and 1m pairs are £240 and £300, with longer lengths available to order). Loop resistance for the conductors is a little higher than for the copper equivalent, but is less than the carbon-conductor First Ultimate.

Directly comparing it with Ultimate was a shock. It seemed that my class favourite had been deposed, and in style! Throughout the range the cable was clearer, sharper and faster.

This is the highest resolving interconnect cable I have heard — talk about brushing away aural cobwebs! While I don't see AJ as a club devotee, most of his cables rock well, and this one is tops for dynamics and rhythm. Stereo images are wide and deep, yet sharply focused with excellent depth. Perspectives were slightly forward compared with the norm.

If you think all this is too good to be true, perhaps you'd be right. Careful referencing showed that this new cable was a touch bright, slightly sibilant, though free of any significant treble 'grain'. The bass, while revealing and impactful, was also a little strong. In some systems Ultimate may still suffer from some chassis loop hum where a loss in quality is inevitable; in such instances Integration should be first on the list. The Integration single-ended interconnect is also superior where longer cable runs are needed, and where high resolution and noise control are vital. On balance it's equal to, if different from, the marvellous carbon Ultimate.

In a truly audiophile context, a 2m length of balanced XLR-terminated Integration also performed remarkably well. Using an Audio Research Reference 2 and Krell FPB-650M, there was a degree of extra brightness, although in a high-end system this may be accommodated in the selection of components and tuning of the set up, including speaker placement.

The XLR version produced first class dynamics and timing, great transparency and a sound largely free from mid glare and the grain of lower cost cables. The resolution of fine detail was first rate — the Integration XLR could be just right for sorting out a system that's sounding duller than it should.

It's no secret that the all-carbon cables perform well in the digital domain. To test the Integration SE interconnect as a digital cable I compared it with references including Kimber and Transparent Reference. The transports were a Krell 20 and an old but trusted Meridian 200T while the decoder was an Audio Synthesis DAX Decade. Although the impedance match was technically imperfect, there was no problem with sound quality; and it confirmed that if a cable has a good high-frequency (RF) performance, it can also show a good sound quality which maps well from the analogue audio range into the digital

TECHNOLOGY

Measured in the lab, the matched line impedance is 110 ohms, so the balanced form can be used for precisely terminated digital interfacing. The single-ended form is shielded from the sending end. Loop resistance per metre is 0.465 ohms, which is low enough for good hum suppression. Inductance is almost zero, while capacitance is a moderate 100 pF/m — fine for lengths up to 3-4 metres for tube equipment, and perhaps up to 10m for tougher solid-state drive sources. The balanced form, however, may be used over much longer runs and is quite economical. For the digital listening tests I used the single-ended form, although the digital balanced form is at least as good.

KEY FEATURES

- Available in SE and XLR formats
- Exceptional resolution and superb rhythmic qualities
- Also performs very well as a digital interconnect

audio domain of pulse transmission.

There was a sense of greater smoothness and clarity in the upper range. The mids were excellently focused and dynamic without any exaggeration. Through the bass, the sound was tight and well extended. Stereo images were spacious and deep with a fine central focus. Rhythm and timing were conveyed very well — overall this cable is up with the top group of references. Great value and highly recommended.

WORDS_MARTIN COLLOMS

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