

Audio Bits

It's Gut to be good

By LAM SENG FATT

Model: GutWire Basic speaker cable

Price: RM2,200 for 2.5m length cables, terminated with gold-plated spades

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WHAT wire?" I asked when I was handed a huge black cardboard box that contained speaker cables for review. Printed on the cover were the words GutWire Basic. It was an unfamiliar name. Monster, Cardas, Tara Labs, AudioQuest, MIT, Analysis Plus, Goertz, WireWorld – these I know, but GutWire?

I logged onto the Net, did a search for the cable, found the company's website (www.gutwire.com) and started reading.

"GutWire Audio Cables was founded on one simple principle: our products retrieve what is on the recording; no adding or subtracting from the signal. We firmly believe in the superior sound of cold-welding (a.k.a. crimping) in the termination process," the website began its tale of how the company achieves superior sound.

I found out that the company, based in Canada, believes not only in cold welding but also in copper, which is claimed to deliver "the most neutral, transparent and natural musical signal."



FEEL IT IN YOUR GUT ... the GutWire Basic speaker cable makes your music sound right.

Gut to the basics

GutWire also uses unique wire-weave patterns and shielding to reject up to 98% of radio frequency interference (RFI) and electromagnetic interference (EMI). The company also claims that the wires are individually handcrafted and not machine made.

Another unique feature is that the GutWire Basic speaker cables are individually jacketed, which means they come in fours instead of the usual two-wire array of most cables. Jacketed in bright yellow and terminated with good quality copper spades, the cables are quite stiff and you have to twist them a little to get the angle right for the spades to slip into the speaker terminals and amp outputs.

The website explains why the cables are individually jacketed. "The faint voices you sometimes hear during a phone conversation are an example of signal interference between adjacent or nearby conductors, commonly known as crosstalk. The term is also applied to frequencies above the audio range where more serious consequences occur when inductive or capacitive crosstalk creates distorted or erroneous data in data link systems.

"The measurement of crosstalk consists of sending a signal of known strength through a conductor and measuring the effect of this signal in an adjacent or nearby conductor." Thus the cables are kept separated to minimise crosstalk. The Basic cable is multi-stranded and contains 138 conductors made of Oxygen-Free Copper.

Why multi-stranded when other manufacturers prefer to use solid-core Litz-wires? "People have argued that solid-core wire is used in power transformers, output transformers and the transmission lines, so the use of solid-core wire seems to be a normal extension. Keep in mind that all those power facilities are built by the lowest-

bidder contractor for the government. The only concern for these contractors is the lower cost of solid-core wire. They are not concerned with the improved sound quality of stranded wire," the company claims.

The company is so sure of its product that it claims "GutWire will improve the overall resolution and tonal balance of your system and provide incredible soundstage that extends in height, width and depth; low frequency response that is accurate, deep, powerful and authoritative; real-life midrange that is natural and musical; amazing 3D imaging with body and texture."

One thing I noted was that the jacket of the cable is quite loose. The company's explanation for this is simple enough: "The tightness of the braid material affects the sound. If the braid jacket is too tight, the sound will lose its 'vividness'. The amount of 'looseness' of the braid jacket is determined after countless hours of empirical research."

Of course, just about every other cable manufacturer makes such bold claims about their products. What matters is whether the claims can be substantiated in listening tests.

Gut to the truth

The resident system comprised the usual Marantz CD 63KI CD player, Audiolab 8000A integrated amp and Mission 782 speakers, with Alphacore Micropurl Silver interconnects and Goertz MI2 Veracity speaker cables providing link-ups. A Malaysian-made Vibraphysics support board also being reviewed provided support for the CD player.

Well, the GutWire website wasn't all hype and hot air – there was some element of truth in the claims.

The bass was surely stronger – on every track the bass notes were presented with conviction, and it had a tendency to attract your attention here, as if to underline that presence. It was much easier to follow the bass guitar and double bass and the bass drums had more "kick."

The mids were presented in a smooth manner, without undue sibilance and the highs were clear and shimmering, if slightly upfront.

Peculiarly, the images were more finely etched out and easier to locate; at the same time this made them seem smaller and thinner. With the Goertz, the images were somewhat fatter and bigger sized, and there seemed to be some smearing of the images because of this.

With the GutWire, the instruments and voices were easily picked out from the layers of music, which led to greater clarity and detail – like echoes in the studio – could be heard. Normally, I only hear such details when I use high-quality headphones such as the Sennheiser HD600. The last time I heard such detail with the Missions was when I used valve amplification.

The GutWire also improved layering and depth; the Goertz tended to flatten the soundstage. In previous reviews of speaker cables, the Goertz trounced its competitors in terms of depth and soundstaging; this time, however, the GutWire bettered it. In comparison, the Goertz's presentation also appeared upfront against the cavernous quality of the GutWire soundstage.

It was only in terms of high-frequency extension that the Goertz could match the GutWire, and cymbals were reproduced with shimmering clarity.

In the midrange, the Goertz sounded smoother but, as mentioned before, the images, especially singers, became fatter and less well defined.

Gut the drift?

The conclusion is that the Basic, which by the way is the lowest model in the GutWire range, is pretty good. Initially, it may sound a bit lean, but later you'll realise that it is because it etches out images very well; it may also seem bright, but that is because its treble delivery is slightly upfront and well extended.

The 64-dollar question is, of course, whether it is worth it. At more than two grand for four 2.5m strands of wire, it is pricey. Those owning mid-level CD players or amps may as well use the money to upgrade these components first.

The general rule is to allocate 10% of the cost of the entire stereo system for the cables and interconnects. If you were to follow this piece of advice strictly, your CD player, amp and speakers must cost in the region of 20 grand before you ought to buy the GutWire Basic.

Interestingly, in the review system, the cables cost more than the amp. But did the cables make a difference in such a modest system? The answer is obviously yes. Is it worth it? That, well, is a difficult question to answer.

Pros: *Clarity; large soundstage; strong bass and finely etched images.*

Cons: *A bit stiff; expensive; yellow jacket may be too striking for some.*