

Gutwire cable system

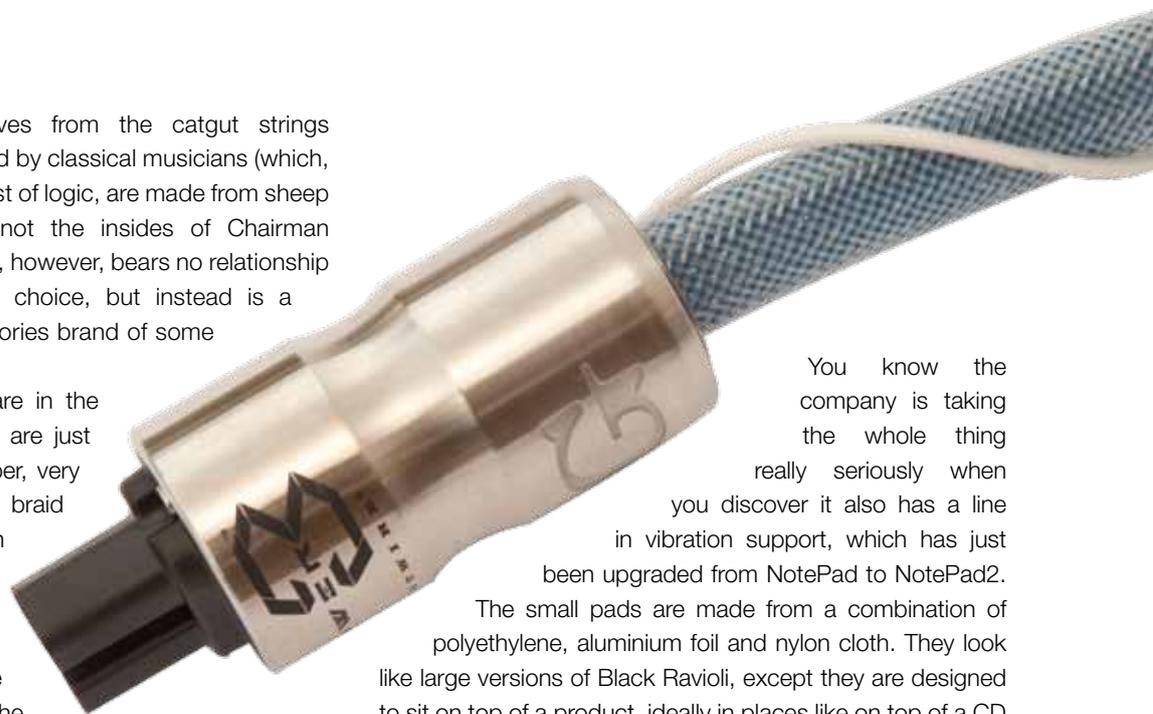
by Alan Sircom

The name derives from the catgut strings traditionally used by classical musicians (which, in a peculiar twist of logic, are made from sheep intestine, and not the insides of Chairman Meow). Gutwire, however, bears no relationship to the violinist's strings of choice, but instead is a Canadian cable and accessories brand of some distinct note.

Gutwire's cables are rare in the high-end world in that they are just good, solid high-purity copper, very well shielded using copper braid and Mylar, insulated with Teflon, hand-made and cold-welded... and those last two make the cables necessarily expensive. The great thing is this makes the cables remarkably consistent; what you get across the board is a very similar sound, just a sound capable of being used in more and more exotic systems as you climb the Gutwire ladder. This doesn't happen so often with brands when you start with copper, go through silver-coated-copper and end up with adamantium-wrapped-kryptonite.

We can't quite escape from the world of high-end materials science though; the top Vision speaker cables are laced with Germanium (Gutwire also made an iPhone 4/4S case that was made of Titanium and Germanium and cost a small fortune – and it made claims about Germanium releasing positive ions to help counteract the negative ionic effect of the modern world: all I know is it doesn't fit if you use a glass protector on the read screen of the iPhone 4S).

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You know the company is taking the whole thing really seriously when you discover it also has a line in vibration support, which has just been upgraded from NotePad to NotePad2.

The small pads are made from a combination of polyethylene, aluminium foil and nylon cloth. They look like large versions of Black Ravioli, except they are designed to sit on top of a product, ideally in places like on top of a CD transport mechanism or an amplifier's transformer. The pad did help quieten down the spinning disc drive of the Lyngdorf CD1's transport mechanism slightly, but whether this was due to putting a 350g weight on the top plate of a CD player or down to its EMI and RFI absorbing properties remains to be seen. Still, it shows dedication to the cause. Naturally, I can't determine whether the claim for the NotePad2 to degrade over time is a valid one, unless I sit on the review for another three to five years. That's not sitting on the fence; it's waiting for the fence to need a new coat of creosote.

So, instead of going for the nursery slopes of Gutwire, we went for the more impressive end of the scale, with the brand's top UNO-S interconnects and Chime3 speaker cables, although we pulled back from the top power cords, because they were only available in Schuko terminations at the time of writing (so we ended up with the C-Clef2, although for 20A power connectors, we also used the more up-market Pure3). The speaker features 16AWG and interconnect cables sports 16AWG high-purity, oxygen-free copper conductors.

The signal cables all feature a resonance controller/terminator, an impressive bit of metal at both ends of the cable. In the interconnect, this lozenge-shaped terminator helps keep the cable's individual conductors in their deliberately loose lay and the speaker cables in their individually shielded sections within their overall inch-wide sheath. Meanwhile the power cord is just as thick, but not inflexible, and has a flying croc- ▶



▶ clipped lead for the option to float or ground the outer shielding. You can't really get away with writing about Gutwire without mentioning the word 'shielding' dozens of times, because that's its big USP, and the company subscribes heavily to the 'we live in an electromagnetic and radio frequency soup' view of the modern world. As someone who sees a list of between 18-25 wi-fi routers at home, perhaps this isn't far from the truth. But what is more important is 'does it matter'?

Judging by the performance of the cables as a complete family, the answer is 'who cares, when it sounds this good?' Short of building a Faraday cage around my listening room, I'm swimming in RF every day, and if the cable improves performance because it helps limit that, or that it down to another reason is ultimately immaterial. It's the performance that counts. First, common to all the cables supplied for test is a sense of correctness to the tonal balance, with no stray brightness or dull spots in the presentation. The Gutwire sound is one of being impressive soundstage depth and size, and a tonally balanced presentation, albeit with powerful bass. If you are looking for a cable to act as some kind of filter or tone control, the Gutwire cables are not for you, but as an honest reproducer of signal, they are hard to beat.

A fine example of how this works is playing music that isn't quite on the 'audiophile approved' list. Something like Nirvana's epic *Nevermind* album. It's trashy, thrashy brilliance of more than 20 years ago now. Gutwire neither polishes it or makes it screechy; it merely plays it as it should, in the process making you realise just how good both the power trio and the overall recording, mix and mastering really are. The cable lets both the rawness of the band and the polish of the session shine through, when many others just make it like noise. And not noise in a good way. Naturally, moving over to more conventionally better recordings is a treat too, but in a way those demonstration discs that always sound wonderful are less of a test than something more gnarly.

I try to block out the price of a product until I've got the performance down on paper first. I'm usually pretty good at playing 'Predict-A-Price' as a result, but I got the Gutwire cables spectacularly wrong. I thought these were up there with Crystal Cable Absolute Dream in performance... and price. There were aspects where AD beat the Gutwire designs (that high-frequency sparkle is unique to Crystal's top cable) but in other respects it was a peer of one of the best. Outstanding! +

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Prices (as tested)

Gutwire Uno S interconnect: £2,750/1m pair

Gutwire Chime3 loudspeaker cables: £4,400/8ft pair

C-Clef2 power cord: £790/5.5ft

Pure3 power cord: £2,200/6ft

NotePad2 square: £39

iPhone 4/4S case: £150

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