



Chord Signature XL

One of Chord Cable's longest-running products, the Signature, receives just its second upgrade in materials and performance in fifteen years. Review & Lab: **Paul Miller**

There's a lot to be said for the philosophical approach to hi-fi manufacturing: 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it'. Chord Cables is certainly of this persuasion – its ranges are broadly distinguished by geometry, while performance is very gradually 'tickled up' by the transition to steadily superior conductors and dielectrics. For example, the original Signature speaker cable held court for a decade before the Reference version was released [HFN Aug '14].

The Reference benefited from an upgrade to silver-plated OF-copper conductors with a PTFE dielectric. Five years on and the latest 'XL' version of this Signature cable sees the PTFE exchanged for a soft, cross-linked polyethylene (XLPE or, more commonly, PEX) dielectric.

Almost inevitably, costs have crept up over the years, so the latest Signature XL is slightly more expensive than its forebear at £900 for a pre-terminated 1.5m stereo set. Priced at £300 per linear metre, the ticket for our 5m stereo set of Signature XL cable would be £3000.

The physical geometry of Chord's Signature cable is unchanged. Each signal/return conductor is a coaxial type although the silver-plated braid and foil screen remains unconnected. The outer jacket comprises a translucent PVC with a protective nylon mesh that comes in red/black or, as illustrated here, black/black colourways.

The cable's loose twisted-pair geometry pushes the series inductance up very slightly to 0.94µH/m, but the substantial 5.26mm² (10AWG) cross-section of those multi-stranded, silver-plated copper cores keeps the loop resistance down to a fabulously low 5.5mohm/m. Soldered to your choice of



ABOVE: Each of the Signature XL's conductors is a coax cable, but only the central core is connected to the plugs at each end. PTFE is replaced by XLPE in this version

'ChordOhmic' spade or 4mm connectors the power loss is just 0.0059dB/m.

STILL PUNCHING

Substantial-gauge cables typically make the most of amplifiers offering a low output impedance, so I auditioned the XL with Devialet Expert 800 monoblocks, as well as a Constellation Taurus Stereo [HFN Dec '17] and B&W 800 D3s [HFN Oct '16], it proving no less punchy than its Reference forebear.

The rich texture of Gregory Porter's voice on 'Hey Laura' [*Liquid Spirit*; Blue Note] was as deeply poignant as I've heard just as the accompanying Hammond organ and bass developed a tremendous sense of (studio) ambience. I had thought the 2014 Reference lacked a little 'reach' and comparing both cables with a hi-res rendering of 'Take Five' from The Dave

LEFT: Chord's Signature XL is the first of its cables to be factory-terminated with the silver-plated 'ChordOhmic' spade connectors or 4mm banana plugs [illustrated above]

Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out* [Columbia/Legacy; 176.4kHz/24-bit] showed the XL version was able to tease out just a little more air and space and top-end definition. But it was very subtle, almost reverent, in its painting of that alto sax, metred by the piano and percussion behind. ⚡

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Now in XL guise, Chord's Signature retains the combination of low capacitance and resistance that's always ensured it's behaved consistently with a range of different amplifiers. This is not something that can be said of all speaker cables in this price band... Moreover the switch from PTFE to a compliant XLPE dielectric seems to have brought a welcome extra bite, without grain or coarseness, to the upper registers.

Sound Quality: 81%

