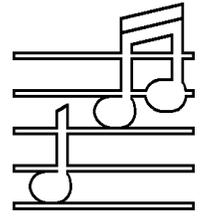


AUDIO BASICS



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF AUDIO INFORMATION
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And the Winner Is –

Duane R. Weeks of California who had the acuity and mental agility to catch me making a rare major error of judgement! No wonder the factory rep never came back.

Even though Nehru jackets were the in thing when the so-called rep visited me, I should have been a bit suspicious of his garb and mannerisms especially when he whispered “beam me up, Scottie,” as he left.

Now some of his actions make more sense. Why was he interested in crystal cartridges instead of magnetic ones (especially dilithium ones)? Now, thanks to Duane, I know. Here is his winning entry.

“Dear Frank:

I should have the Headphones in that you have missed the entire concept behind them! Probably the representative did not have time to fill you in properly but these things are not headphones at all – they were a “vision enhancement device” and were developed to be worn over the eyes; an advanced replica can be seen on Star Trek and are worn by “Jordie.” The model you have may have the pressure sensitive eye optic indents that were originally built in depending on the serial number, in the mid-1600’s; try them! You will be quite delighted with this staggering (for the time) advancement!

Best Regards

Duane”

The Jecklin electronic eyeballs are on the way to Mr. Weeks and another mystery is solved as possible only in *Audio Basics*. Thanks for all the interesting letters. FVA

Don’t Let Them Ban the Wire Ads!

In New York, it appears that the government is once again trying to do your thinking for you by attempting to ban the advertising of “better sounding” speaker wires and interconnect cables.

Of course much of the audiophile community is up in arms about this – but for the wrong reasons. We hear from the “never measure – listen only” faction about how terrible it is that New York gummit officials don’t hear the wonderful virtues of the wire and cables in questions – if only they would use it themselves and had good audiophile grade hi-fi systems then they surely would understand how worthwhile the wire is and what a wonderful value \$600 per foot for interconnect cables really is. The consensus is that the proposed ban is unfair and is being pushed because the do-gooders in power don’t understand the wonderful value that these expensive wires and cables provide.

The audiophiles are missing the point.

The real issue is freedom.

This is simply another case of the government trying to bite off a chunk of our rights under the guise of consumer protection. It is just another futile attempt to make stupidity illegal.

Once again big brother is saying that he knows better than you do, and to make sure you understand that, he will make another activity illegal. He doesn’t like it – so he will throw you in jail if you try and do it – so there – because he is omnipotent and knows better than you do.

The so called consumer protection lobby – the ones that try to “make it illegal” in many fields of endeavor are not really interested in your best interests. They are really just interested in power. They get more power with every bill passed to make something else illegal. They get the power to control another aspect of your life and to further limit your choices.

To have freedom, you must retain the right to be wrong, to make mistakes, and to take risks.

As you allow the government to legislate away your right to be wrong, you decrease your freedom and gain nothing. Mistakes and bad choices will still happen, but in a much more bleak and grey world.

The consumer protection bureaucracy envisions a sterile world devoid of advertising, choice, and risk. Their vision of utopia is exactly what I have experienced traveling across the late Soviet Union by tour bus three years ago.

I saw that world with no advertising at all. There were no choices in consumer goods. What existed were bad and outdated copies of western products. There was no incentive to do better. And, of course, since there were no enforceable rules to keep the “benevolent” rulers from doing to you what they made illegal for you to do yourself - the rulers did it to everybody with a vengeance. Witness the state of industrial pollution in worker’s paradise, for example.

This spring we were fortunate to have a short visit in Odessa and Yalta. Here and there on the streets there was a bit of color – advertising banners in storefronts – indications of private enterprise trying to take root. Most there seem to have learned that excess government control is not utopia. They were willing to face the very difficult time ahead in digging out from under 70 years of “protect you from yourself” repression. But some we talked to were longing for the old ways again, because then you didn’t have to think and you had security. You just had to do what you were told, and you didn’t have to do very much at all. No risk, no worries, no responsibility, no rewards.

By attempting to ban even frivolous and unsubstantiated claims in audio wire advertising, New York officials are showing which side they would be on. They are on the side of those tired old men plotting a return to state control of everything.

If Gorbachev and Yeltsin can learn that absolute state control of your lives is no life at all, why can’t we recognize it when our government wants to take another bite out of ours?

But Don’t Buy the Stuff Anyway!

I think any audiophile wire company should have the right to advertise any claim (outrageous or otherwise) about their product they choose and should have the right to charge whatever the market will bear for it.

I think the companies should have the right to fail and go out of business if their claims deviate so far from reality that potential clients don’t believe them and go away.

If their products and claims make their clients genuinely happy then so be it; there are expensive sugar pills available in every field of endeavor. Is a Ferrerri really worth 10 times as much as a Porsche? Is the engineering, design technology, and capabilities that much better? Is the Porsche worth 4 times the price of a Mazda? Where do the boundaries between value and sugar pill begin and end?

I think you should have the right to buy \$1000 worth (or not worth) of speaker wire and to believe that it made your high fidelity system much better.

But I wish you wouldn’t.

Our problem is not with how you perceive the sonic quality of your speaker wire.

Our concern is that far too often the use of extra cost wires and cables causes real damage to your audio system.

One way to justify a higher price for a product is to make it look more expensive. Since everybody knows that “bigger is better,” then one way of making a better (more expensive looking) speaker wire or interconnect cable is to make it bigger.

So, with rare exceptions, the first common step in marketing a premium priced speaker wire or cable is to give it a bigger diameter, equipped with massive plugs on the ends.

Unfortunately, these styling efforts tend to interfere with function, rather than enhance it. The cable purveyors simply ignore that fact that equipment builders have to live in the real world of standardized jack specifications and spacing.

In the industry, standards are established to allow the rational connection of various brands and types of equipment from different suppliers. The standards specify the type and size of jacks to be provided for different purposes. For example, you probably expect the AC plug on the new little cooling fan you bought at K-Mart to fit into your 120V AC wall output at home. You probably would not be too happy if the fan came with a "bigger and better" AC plug that did not fit into anything. Actually the AC plug problem really exists. Polarized plugs (those with a wider ground blade) on some recent equipment won't fit into older style AC outlets designed before the polarized plug standard was promulgated.

But manufacturers can cope with a change in standards and supply the appropriate hardware – as long as we know what the standards are and what the hardware is supposed to accommodate.

What we cannot cope with is no standards at all – hardware randomly selected to look good even though it violates all rational engineering logic and purpose. We cannot design connections to fit "your cables" when we have no way of knowing what "your cables" are. Our task is to supply jacks that reliably accept industry standard cables. Your responsibility (if you want reliable operation of the equipment) is to use cables and speaker wires of rational size with industry standard plugs. If you insist in pounding square plugs into round holes, don't be dismayed when a few corners break off and things don't work as well as you had hoped.

Our "pet peeves" are as follows:

- Speakers wires terminated in oversized "U Lugs". The industry standard speaker and amplifier terminals are 5-way binding posts on 3/4" centers to accept laboratory standard dual banana plugs, single banana plugs, or standard pin plugs, normal sized bare wire, and small U Lugs. Giant U Lugs cause serious termination problems for two reasons. First, the oversized lugs don't fit properly. All too often they come loose and short into each other at the slightest bump. This will at best cause you a troubleshooting hunt and at worst destroy an amplifier channel. It never makes the system sound better. Secondly, to overcome problem one (to attempt a secure connection) users tend to grab a pipe wrench or similar to tighten down the jack on the oversized U Lug. Alas, the old adage "tight is right, too tight is bung" is ignored and the banana jacks are twisted loose or broken completely off all in the interest of better sounding cables.

Don't do it. Use cables terminated in standard banana plugs or better yet double banana plugs. What if your speaker wire is too big to fit standard banana plugs? That is your clue that your speaker wire is far out of bounds too. For most reliable, and thus most musical, speaker wire connections, use standard industry connections on speaker wires of rational diameter. If you break the amp or speaker trying to use oversized cables, they won't sound better.

- Interconnect cables with excessively large metal plug ends, especially the clamping type. Far too often, the out-sized metal barrels touch each other (or the wrong parts of the chassis) causing ground loops and excess and sometimes system damaging hum. The most common repair part needed with the old Dyna St-70 vacuum tube amplifier is a paper match-book cover. Where is it used? Of course it is wedged between the two metal barrels of the input plugs to remove the user supplied common ground in the wrong place and get rid of the hum he suddenly picked up when chang-

ing to "premium" interconnect cables. With standard cables, the barrels of the two channels don't touch and there isn't any hum to fix.

Unfortunately, cables supplied with non-standard barrels tend to have oversized inner connections too. These tend to permanently deform the inner contacts in the equipment's correctly sized RCA jacks. This causes channel dropouts only curable by replacing the jacks in the equipment. The impressive oversized fittings on the cables do not generate better sound; they only generate repair bills.

Finally, clamping type cables cause more problems yet when twisted. They actually break loose the internal connections to the jacks. The inner conductor of a jack must be electrically isolated from the jack body and thus cannot be anchored firmly enough to withstand a vise-grip attack. A clamping plug (which looks like it would provide a better electrical connection) certainly does not provide a better connection when you use it to twist the internal soldered shielded cable in the equipment completely off.

Paying no attention at all to the subjective debate regarding the innate sonic quality of various brands of speaker wires and interconnect cables, we still can observe that premium priced cables and wires do not have to be constructed stupidly. They do not have to be system breakers.

One reason I am still using the free samples of Kimber Kable given to me several years ago is that the fittings are durable, they are of premium quality mechanically, and they actually fit standard jacks without risk of damage. The Kimber plugs (which are plugged in and out often as we test equipment) are as snug a fit as when new and show no wear. The flexible speaker wires are terminated in reliable double banana plugs. They fit, they don't break, and they cause no problems. Maybe this is why I think they sound a little bit better too. I don't sell Kimber Kables (extra cost cables are low on my priority list of things you should do

to make your audio system better) but you won't make me unhappy if you use them because they won't be a negative, and if they help you enjoy your audio system more, well, that is fine too if you are happy paying the price.

Certainly though you should have the right to choose whether to pay the price or not.

Certainly any manufacturer of cables, accessories, electra fuel ignitors, or whatever should be allowed to tell you his story and show you his wares. You must retain the right to look for a good value or to fall for a tall tale. Does anyone actually believe the yarns spun by the demonstrators of magic color coordinated car waxes and do-it-yourself haircutters on TV? Do you really need to be protected from these pitchmen? Wouldn't the world be too bland a place without Professor Harold Hill? Thus, I support that famous bumper sticker, "Save the cables!"

Connoisseur Drive Belts?

One of my readers, Rev. Robert Hughes of Sewanee, Tennessee, has informed me of a possible source for drive belts that may work in Connoisseur turntables. He got a belt from Premium Parts and Electronics, P. O. Box 28, Whitewater, WI 53190. Their phone is 414-473-2151 or 800-558-9572. Their part that works for a BD103 is OB19.5. Give them a try.

Only One Used Piece - but a Good One!

My daughter is selling her upgraded Super Tuner Two in a nice gold faceplate Dyna FM-5 chassis. This has our most recent circuit boards and the newest improved Ω Omega II audio circuits. If you have been hoping for our musical FM performance in a Dyna chassis to match your other Dyna components this may be your last chance. The price is \$345.00. Call us now at 612 890-3517. There may never be another one this good again.

Sorry we were late this month. A few days were lost exercising the old Quattro out West, losing nickels in Deadwood, and hobnobbing with Hells Angeles look-a-likes (100,000 of um) at Sturgis, SoDak. What fun. FVA & DVA