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Furutech FP-TCS31 power cable and
FI-28/FI-38 connectors Review

2016 Netherlands

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Furutech FP-TCS31 power cable and FI-28/FI-38 connectors

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Comparing the new cable and connectors to the Alpha 3 and FI25/FI35 predecessors

Furutech intended the unshielded Alpha 3 power cable to be used with power amplifiers, leaving the digital source duties to their more affordable but screened cables. I found however that the Alpha 3 sounded most excellent with just about any audio component, and I have used it with great success in combination with a large number of DACs for several years. It is my experience that shielding in itself doesn't greatly influence *the sound* of a cable. Shielding can in fact alter the perceived low level detailing of a cable, but it's the geometry and insulation materials that most influence its character.



The Alpha 3 has now been replaced by the FP-TCS31, which is actually also a screened cable. Also discontinued are my favorite Furutech connectors, the FI25 and FI-E35.

Naturally I was now curious to see how the cables and connectors would compare and I figured that a nice

comparative review was in order. This would however require several connectors and several meters of cable. Upon contacting Dutch company [Audio-Life](#), Caspar was enthusiastic about my plan and more than happy to provide the required products for review.



Comparing Connectors

**Alpha 3 + FI25/FI35 gold plated connectors &
Alpha 3 + FI28/FI38 gold plated connectors**



First candidates for comparison are the new FI28/FI-E38 connectors. In preparation, I have made two cables

of identical length, one with the outgoing FI25/FI-E35 connectors and the other with the new FI28/FI-E38 connectors to enable direct comparisons. Both cables were run in the same amount of time, and connected to the same extension block output, with the same phase. First comparison is with the Wadia 25 DAC. This is a true oldie by now, but because the Alpha 3 matches so well with it, and I am very much accustomed to the combination, I'm starting off with this classic DAC. I will make the same comparisons using a [Meridian 818](#) as DAC, which is a currently available product.



Construction

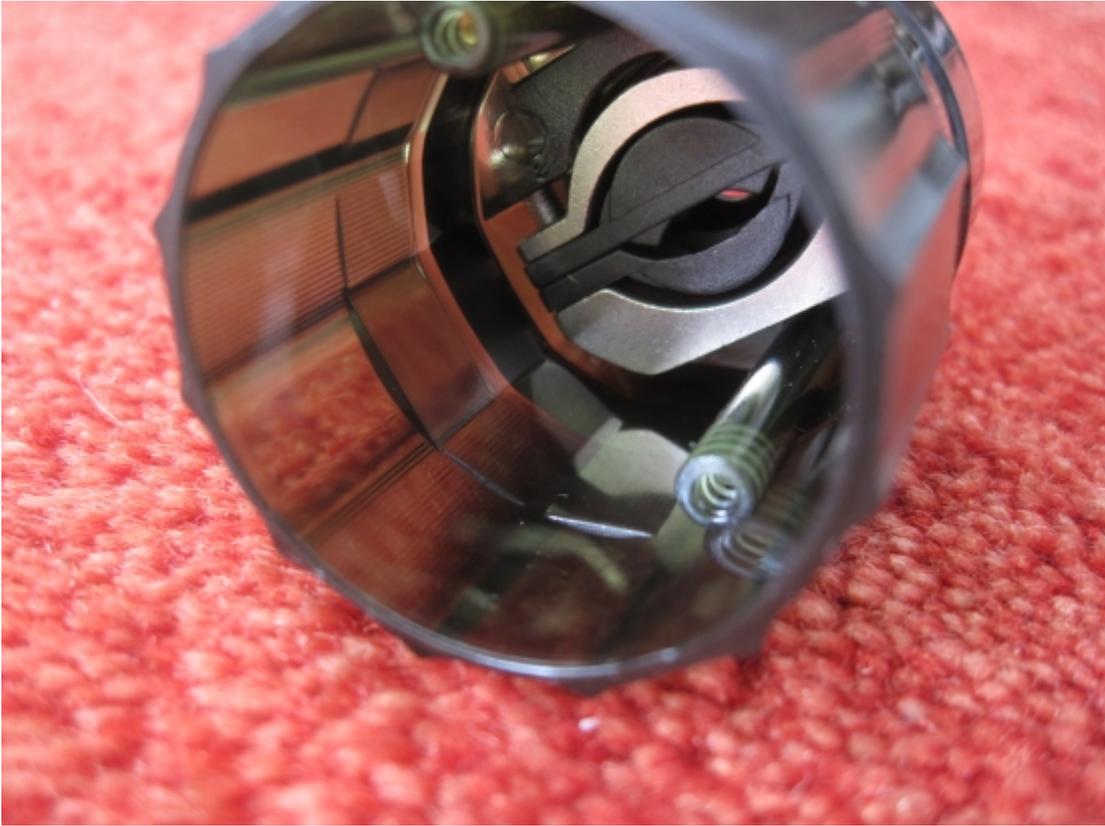
Both connectors housings are made from a hybrid of nylon and carbon and the conductors are pure copper with pure gold plating. There's good news for the people who have had to deal with broken strain relief pieces as they are now made of non-magnetic steel, and impossible to break. The rest of the design is also subtly but meaningfully changed for the better, with new solid screw terminals for the schuko plug that allow the bare wires to be clamped in between two gold/rhodium plated metal parts in place of being screwed down directly with a screw as with the initial FI-E35 versions, so no more crushing of the litze in the process. Also there is newly designed earthing of all metal parts and a new classier looking green housing part. Overall, the new connectors now look and feel even more high end.



Above left: an early sample of the outgoing FI-E35 with normal screw terminals, top right: the new FI-E38 with solid clamps. Note that the most recent version of the FI-E35 also had similar clamps.



Above left: new FI-E38 housing with non-magnetic metal strain relief in place of the plastic ones of the outgoing models



Wadia 25

The Alpha 3 with FI25/FI-E35 connectors matches very well with the Wadia 25, enhancing the DAC's inherent qualities. Like most Wadias, the DAC is however quite dry in the treble and not very fluid overall. This can be fixed to some extent with warm and smooth sounding cables. I have tried such cables as Harmonic Technology Pro ACII+ with Wadias on various occasions, but this always seems to diminish the areas in which Wadias tend to excel.



The beauty of the Furutech Alpha 3 is that it enhances focus and low level detail, provides great speed,

dynamics and PRAT and adds a touch of body and texture in the upper midbass/lower midrange. Although the Alpha 3 is a very neutral and honest cable, it never seems to make the sound in any way hard or unpleasant, and in this implementation, it compliments that Wadia's strengths, rather than compensating for its weaknesses.



As a source I use an [Aurender N10](#) music server. The Wadia is connected via S/PDIF using a [Mad Scientist HDC+](#) cable.



Switching to the new connectors I am truly amazed at the large difference in sound. There's more body and timbre is richer, but without making the sound soft. What's more, not only focus is improved; the soundstage

is also wider. Remember we're only talking about a change of power connectors! The cable is the same and has had the same amount of running in, is used with the same polarity and is connected to the same power extensionblock position. Listening closer I get the feeling that although the large dynamic swings are entirely intact, transients sharpness seems to be slightly less well defined resulting in a seemingly less immediate sound than with the old connectors. To confirm this, I'll go back to the old connectors once more.



Well, maybe the old connectors seem to be somewhat more direct indeed, but that is only because they also sound quite dry in comparison. I'm not even so sure now that they are actually more dynamic, and what predominates is a feeling of having stepped down a notch in quality. Prior to this comparison I was already aware that the FI25/FI-E35 connectors sound most dry of all the Furutech connectors I tried, but at the time they also provided the best low level detailing of them all, and so I stuck with them. Listening to them now in comparison with their successors, there is no ignoring that the fulness of timbre is reduced considerably, as is the soundstage width, compared to their successors.



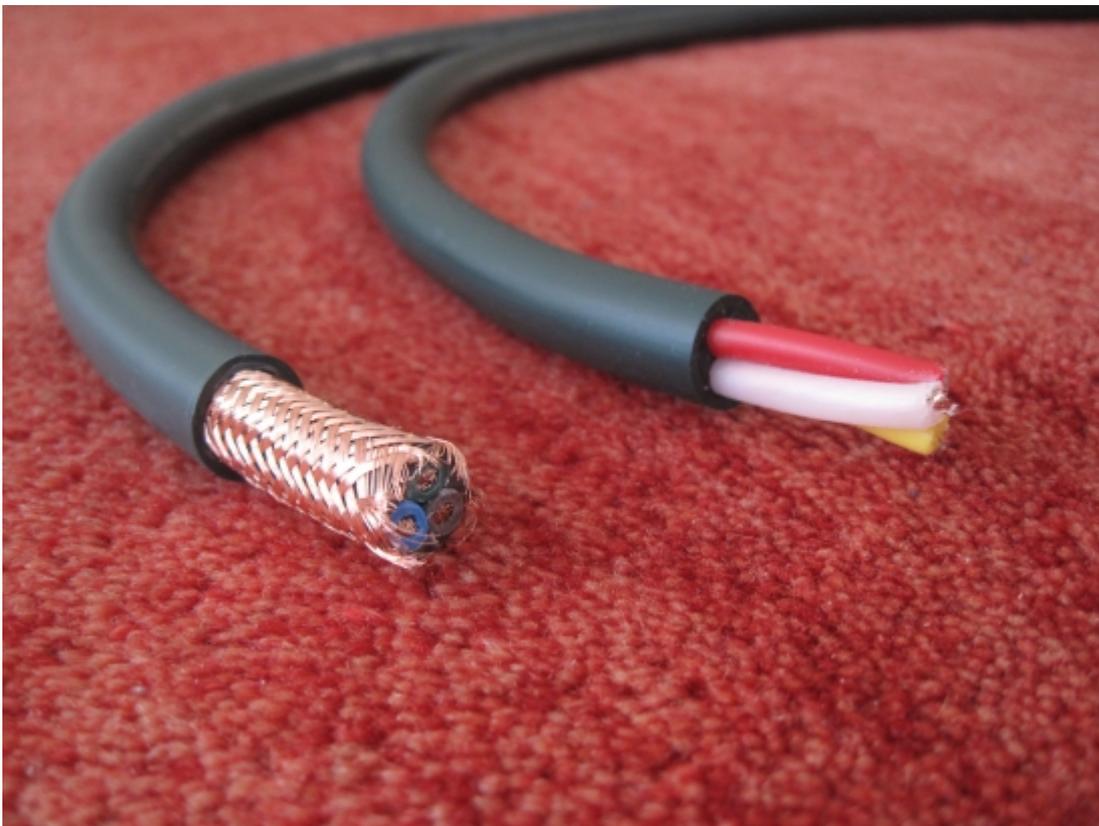
Meridian 818v3

The [Meridian 818v3](#) is a modern and flexible device offering DAC, preamp and streaming endpoint facilities. To keep matters simple, its use for this test is strictly as a USB DAC. Source is again the Aurender N10, connected via an AudioQuest Diamond USB cable. Comparing between the Alpha 3 cables I hear similar changes between the FI25/FI-E35 and FI28/FI-E38 connectors: more body and richer tonality, along with a more expansive soundstage with the new connectors, without losing any detail or expression. The difference is quite staggering really, and although it is a little early to say for sure, I think I have found my new favorite connectors!

Comparing Cables

**Alpha 3 + FI25/FI-E35 gold plated connectors &
FP-TCS31 + FI25/FI-E35 gold plated connectors**

It's now time to compare the new FP-TCS31 cable to its predecessor. I have connected a second set of the outgoing FI25/FI35 connectors to the new FP-TCS31 cable so that we can see how the cable itself compares with its predecessor.



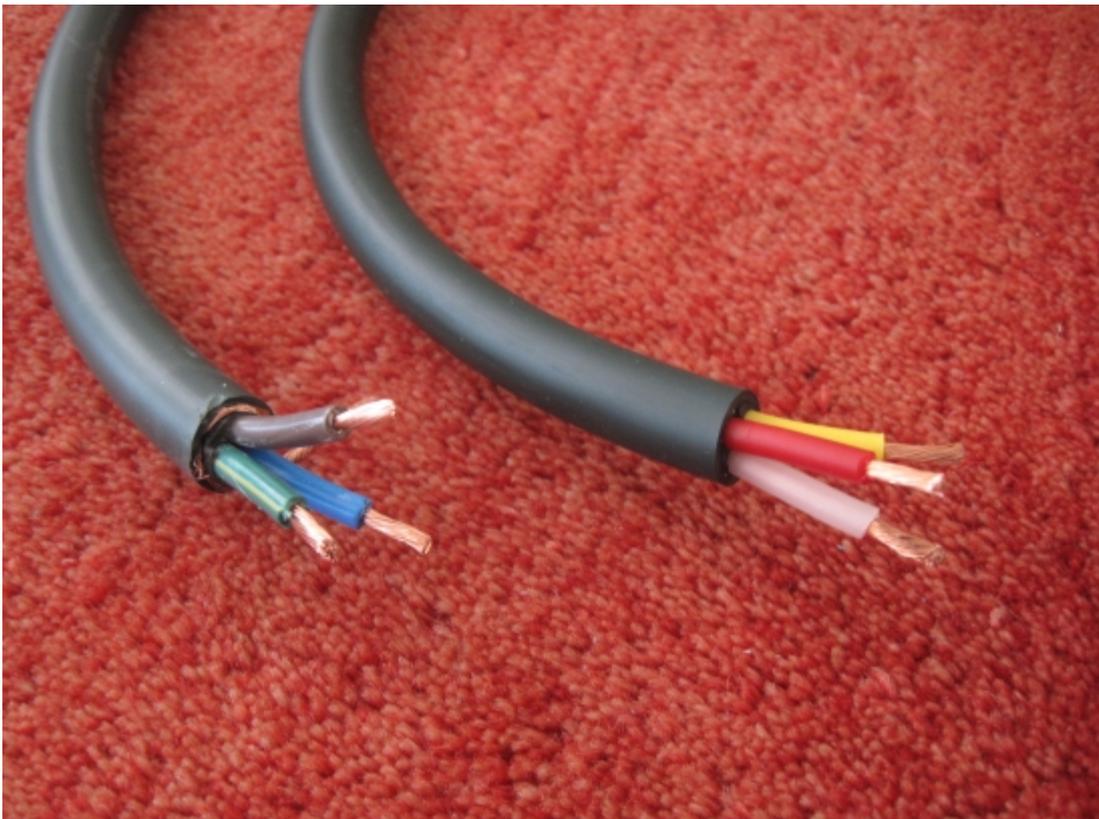
Above left: new FP-TCS31 cable with screening, right: outgoing Alpha 3 without screening.



Above: FP-TCS31 cable with outer sleeve removed and screening mesh combined into a strand.

Construction

Unlike the Alpha 3 that is made from a combination of PVC and PE, the FP_TCS31 cable's outer and inner insulation consists of "Special grade Flexible PVC". PE is a bit like Teflon and so if the PE conductor insulation has been replaced with PVC, I would expect the cable to sound smoother than its predecessor. As always, when attaching the connectors I connected the shield to earth on the source side (extension block / wall outlet), but kept it floating at the destination side.



Above left: FP-TCS31, right: Alpha 3. As far as I can see, the individual litze conductors and the combined gauge seem the same size.

Wadia 25

Switching from the Alpha 3 with FI25/FI-E35 connectors to the new FP-TCS31 cable with the same connectors, again there is a marked difference in soundstaging. As with the new connectors, the FP-TCS31 manages to widen the soundstage considerably. Along with this change, the overall sound balance is also changed: bass is fuller and fatter, midrange is warmer and more liquid, and treble is more fluid. While the outgoing Alpha 3 cable could be accused of sounding somewhat dry, this is definitely not the case with its successor. Overall I'd say that the FP-TCS31 sounds closer to the global Furutech sound than did the Alpha 3, which was something of a deviation from their smooth house sound.



This begs the question: is the new cable as lively and articulate as its predecessor? Swapping back to the old cable again confirms that this indeed not the case, the Alpha 3 being more immediate and articulate and more forward in the midrange. But in comparison to its successor it is also tonally a little dull and matter of fact. The FP-TCS31 by contrast is a warm bath with smooth, full and rich midrange, and no diminishing of fine detail, but indeed a certain reduction of attack and clarity in the midrange.

Meridian 818

The Meridian 818 is every bit as dynamically differentiated as the Wadia 25, but differs in treble presentation, which is quite a bit more fluid, meaning that dry sounding cables such as the Alpha 3 match very nicely. This could lead one to fear that the much smoother sounding FP-TCS31 cable could sound overly smooth when matched with the Meridian, but this is not the case. It's likely partially thanks to the 818's excellent rhythmic and dynamic expressiveness, that the energy and drive is effectively retained.

The FP-TCS31 is certainly more creamy sounding than its predecessor the Alpha 3, and shifts the working point from tight and forward to fluid and relaxed, but matches with the Meridian just as well as did its predecessor.

At this stage I thought it would be a good time to swap back to the Alpha 3 cable with the new FI28/FI-E38 connectors. Interestingly, this provides a somewhat similar overall sound as with the FP-TCS31 cable with FI25/FI-35 connectors, but with more drive and presence. At this stage, this would seem to mean that the ideal balance is obtained by combining old and new elements, and in some situations this might indeed be the case but later comparisons with a third source component will prove that this is also relative.

Going back to the Alpha 3 + FI25/FI-E35 connectors one final time, I do hear that midrange is a little bit more spritely and midbass a little more articulate, but the sound is also gray and uninspiring in comparison and I

can't help but feeling that this is quite a large step back overall.

It seems that these new connectors really are some kind of magic-inducers!



Comparing Gold and Rhodium Connectors

FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 gold plated connectors &

FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 rhodium plated connectors

Going from the Alpha 3 cable with FI28/FI-E38 connectors to the all new combination of FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 gold plated connectors it is interesting to find that even though the overall sound is more relaxed, it is plenty powerful and there is incredible detailing, but presented in a natural manner, without any etch. It seems that the new connectors lift the new cable's spirit to arrive at a combination of each of the components' best features, resulting in a sound that is smooth and forgiving, but neutral and highly detailed.

And now for the piece de resistance (forgive my lazyness of not using accents): the Rhodium plated connectors. Previous experience with other Furutech connectors has informed me on what differences to expect, but given the incredible results with the FI28 and FI-E38 gold plated variants I am expecting even more from the rhodium ones.

And indeed, the Rhodium connectors really deliver! Compared to the gold plated variants, the sound remains smooth, but with more explicit detail, more energetic transients and even slightly increased perceived speed. After a while however I do notice that there is now less of the "golden" shimmer that the gold plated connectors offer, there's less romance in the air, in spite of the overall still warm and relaxed feeling. But, this is in combination with the Meridian 818 which is itself not a smooth sounding component. Remember my always going on about the importance of making the right combinations? That's why I will throw one final audio component into the mix.



Mark Levinson 390S

The 390S CD player is something of a classic by now, but my unit has recently been checked completely. It has been treated to a new transport and all its critical capacitors have been replaced and after a period of running in, it now sounds as good as new. Even if you won't find many reviews carried out using this player elsewhere anymore, being a constant factor throughout many of my reviews however hopefully it is still a good point of reference.

FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 gold

My default cable used with the Levinson for the longest time has been a Harmonic Technology Pro ACII+. This cable is admittedly a little too relaxed, but it enhances the player's inherent smoothness nicely, making for a more seductive and relaxed sound than is usually expected from CD.

Going from the Pro ACII+ to the Furutech FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 gold plated connectors I am surprised to hear that the Furutech is much more upbeat and articulate, and dynamic expression is also lots improved, with a feeling of better PRAT as a result. Even though I classified the FP-TCS31 above as a smooth sounding cable, it is actually quite a lot more neutral than the Harmonic Technology Pro ACII+, which is nicely offsetting my initial impression. The Pro ACII+ does have seemingly more fluid (less dry) treble, but does this by adding considerable smearing across the frequency band. This can indeed ameliorate "digital" sounding recordings but the price to pay for this forgiveness is less of the toe-tapping quality and a timbre that is less than convincing. The Furutech's timbre by contrast is highly natural and absolutely acoustically convincing.

FP-TCS31 + FI28/FI-E38 rhodium

Going from the new Furutech FP-TCS31 cable + FI28/FI-E38 gold plated connectors to the same cable with the FI28/FI-E38 rhodium plated connectors the big surprise is that treble is now more fluid and refined, but without adding any smearing. In fact, the whole frequency range is spot on neutral top to bottom and transparency seems even better than with the gold plated connectors.

Just as with the Meridian, I can hear that the Rhodium connectors have a cleaner sound which makes the music sound more upbeat, neutral and transparent. The Levinson however is quite a smooth sounding player

itself, and the combination still retains the warmth and richness for which I like the player so much, and there is still a seductively emotional quality to the music. In fact, this may be the best cable I heard with the 390S yet.



Conclusion

New versions of existing products don't necessarily need to be better than their predecessors, certainly not for everyone and every situation. Furutech's new FI28/FI-E38 connectors however can definitely be labelled as a large overall improvement over the FI25/FI35E connectors that they replace. The new FP-TCS31 cable is more of a deviation from the Alpha 3 cable that it succeeded, but sounds more in line with the overall Furutech house sound as present in the majority of the Furutech lineup. While less articulate and certainly more relaxed and smoother than its predecessor, the FP-TCS31 cable manages to extract more detail from recordings and sounds more powerful and more colourful, with a larger soundstage as a bonus.