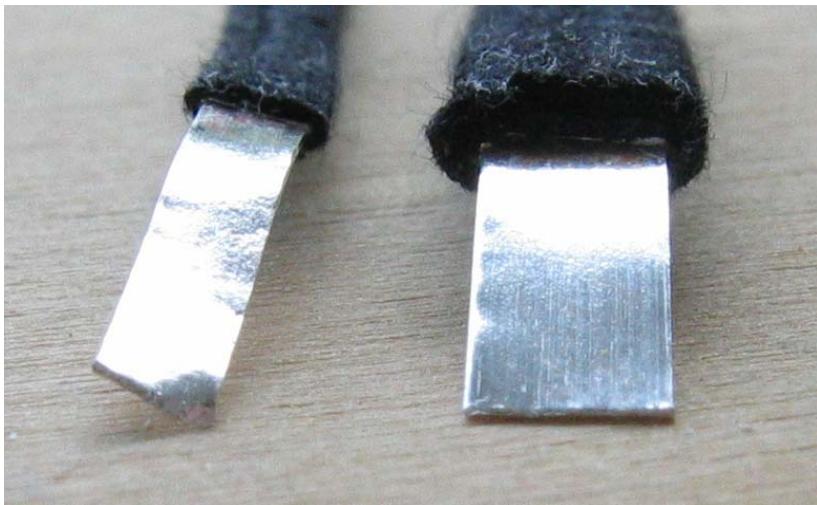


Listening notes on Duelund 0.5 and 2.0 cables by Chris Bell



Introduction

I've been buying cables from Hificollective for some years now, building them into a multitude of designs, doggedly pursuing the dream of the perfect cable. I haven't succeeded yet but I have learnt a lot and I decided to pass some of this on by writing 'An Idiot's Guide to Cables' which I wrote for Paul Messenger at Hi-Fi Critic (December 2008). This year Hificollective asked me to use my experience to provide listening notes on some of its cables as well as tips on construction and design. Of course I hope you enjoy these articles but mostly I hope they lead you to having more fun with your music.

Notes on listening

The idea that cables sound the same between different pieces of equipment is, in my experience, nonsense. You will gather from this statement that I have little time for the idea of the cable loom which I think is a corporate concept whose aim is to get us to spend more money than we need. The listening tests below were all conducted using cables to carry signals into the pre-amp (Exposure 21), whether from tuner or CD player. However, when listening to these same cables between pre- and power amps (Exposure 18 mono-blocks) the differences are much less marked. For example, you will see me write below that the 0.5 doesn't have the same bass weight as the 2.0 but if I plug the 0.5 between pre- and power amps that shortfall disappears. Of course the obvious solution to any such uncertainty is to listen before you buy and the great news is that Hificollective can lend you a cable to try out before you buy.

Sound in the Wires

The Duelund wires are certainly different for all sorts of reasons but the most apparent one when unpacking them is that they are not round. These pure silver foil conductors covered by an oil impregnated silk dielectric are flat and thin measuring 2mm across for the 0.5 and 4mm for the 2.0. The 2.0 also has a double thickness of silk insulator to protect it which gives it a more solid feel altogether.

And differences, of course, extend to the listening experience. I began by using two of the 0.5 wires laid side-by-side for each cable, and soldered them into some WBT next generation copper phono plugs—WBT-0110 Cu. This is not theoretically an ideal construction because parallel wires don't reject RF interference well and in an ideal world one would want to see these wires twisted around each other. However, at first glance Duelund's flattened construction makes this very difficult indeed.

This RF interference would be expected among other things to reduce the upper frequency range of the cable but this was not apparent as I began to listen. That was the first surprise and the second, for a cable that carried no shielding, was the impressively dark background and separation of images in the soundstage. These factors and the cable's ability to transmit fine image detail create a stunning sense of transparency. I contacted Hificollective to discuss my findings and it was suggested I try the Duelund 2.0 in the same configuration. I also decided to e-mail Frederik at Duelund about why these cables sounded so distinctive.

Frederik related that the idea behind the oil impregnation of the silk dielectric is that it allows moisture from the air to reach the silver without oxidation. In effect it creates a bipolar dielectric that cannot be charged statically. He didn't mention whether the flattened shape of the conductor also had some sort of effect on the sound but my feelings are that it might.

Anyway, whatever the theory it is the listening that counts and the two Duelund cables can be heard to share characteristics with each other such as dark backgrounds, good image separation and detail and above all, a lovely sense of transparency.

Differences can be heard when analysing their overall tonal characteristics with the 2.0 sounding somewhat darker than the 0.5 and further listening shows why this might be the case with the 2.0 having a deeper grip, reach and weight in the bass allowing it to have an almost visceral impact whereas the 0.5 is lighter. The 0.5 on the other hand can provide detail which is not as clear as on the 2.0 so for example on Freddy Hubbard's, Hub Tones track 4, 'Lament for Booker', Reggie Workman's fingers on the bass can be heard as well as the timbre the wood give off from the instrument. The 2.0 allows us to hear some of this but more as snatches of detail rather than a running commentary as on the 0.5. I never heard any sense of hardness or highlighting in either cable and both really excel at the reproduction of human voices, which are transmitted with delicious natural detail and warmth. When I look back at my notes this word 'natural' kept cropping up and for me it was one of the defining features of the cables. From a timing perspective the 2.0 improves on the 0.5 although this, as well as dynamics and bass extension can be improved on the latter by shielding it (see below).

Both wires produce a good sense of soundstage depth and height but the 0.5 is a little more generous when it comes to width.

This sort of analysis is all very well but without a reference it is just another cheap opinion so I compared both wires to my own reference cable, the Cardas Golden Cross. The Cardas is good with voices making them very clear but both the Duelund wires exceeded this clarity producing one of the best and most natural deliveries of midrange and upper midrange I've ever heard. I have already mentioned the lack of hardness in the Duelunds whereas the Cardas highlights the upper midrange at the expense of an uneven drop in the supporting midrange. There is a sense of parts trying to come together on the Cardas, which impairs its transparency whereas the Duelund is very natural and believable. However, perfect cables don't exist and as I have already mentioned the 0.5 unshielded is shy (nevertheless very tidy) in the bass region but it can't compete with the Cardas's weight whereas the 2.0 not only does, it

also improves on the latter's slight softness. The Cardas inches ahead of the 2.0 on the timing front but not by much and from an overall tonal point of view the 2.0 comes closest to the Cardas albeit a little darker.

An important characteristic of twisting wires is that it can improve the outline of musical images making them more discreet and focussed and although the Duelund does a good job of this, instruments do appear a little flattened and lacking in textural depth. For me, textural depth makes me believe I can see a three dimensional musician in space; I don't just hear Reggie Workman's bass in detail but I can see it as a solid object. Some may refer to this phenomenon as spatial timbre. This eludes me somewhat on the Duelund but not on the Cardas. I decided to address this issue and began experimenting with a twisting effect on the Duelunds, which involved passing the wires across each other whilst keeping them in the same plane. I found I could get them to cross about sixteen times for a one metre length and on listening was rewarded with improved image focus and outline especially in the mid- to lower frequency range. The Duelund was now capable of matching the Cardas in this respect but still fell short on that issue of three-dimensional timbre.

It is easy when reviewing cables to get hung up on detail. Yes the Cardas can impart a sense of texture to instruments that the Duelund doesn't but this is just one aspect of the overall sound. I kept coming back to the Duelund because of what it does extremely well which is seamless natural sounding detail and transparency. The Cardas, on the other hand, seems to chop up images somewhat and I find myself mentally trying to join them together again.

But there is another dimension of enjoyment for us DIY cable guys to be had with the Duelund and that is its simplicity. Without heavy shielding or complex engineering a simple run of cable can sound so good and believe me having tried countless wires, this is an uncommon thing indeed.

Shielding the 0.5

I have already mentioned improvements in bass extension, grip and overall timing in the 0.5 by shielding it (with aluminium tape and braided wire) and in this respect the Duelund behaves like any other wire. So we can also expect the shield to lower background noise further and improve image separation, which it does. But there is a fly in the ointment as there so often is with shields, in that something is lost and with the Duelund it is that smooth and even mid-range. With the Shield, the 0.5 (I haven't tested the 2.0) has better timing, a more extended bass but now the breath from a singer's voice is not as clear or natural and the upper frequencies, whilst never hard are nevertheless brighter. The decision whether or not to shield is not a difficult one for me as Duelund's biggest advantage is that natural and smooth mid- to upper. The thicker Deulunds on the other hand provide better bass, dynamics and timing anyway whilst retaining that lovely mid range although the price you pay is some loss of upper frequency energy. Now who is going to try a combination of both?

Summary

The unshielded Duelunds produce a beautifully smooth, detailed and transparent mid-range with an even reproduction across the frequency spectrum without any highlighting or hardness. The shielded 0.5 has improved timing and bass extension over its unshielded version, but with a loss of midrange detail and evenness. Tonally

the Duelund 2.0 is darker than the 0.5 with better timing, dynamics and bass extension but with less high frequency information.