

Black Rhodium Quickstep Loudspeaker Cable

By Janine Elliot

Janine Elliot cuts a rug with the Black Rhodium Quickstep loudspeaker cables costing £400 for a 3m pair

BLACK RHODIUM QUICKSTEP SPEAKER CABLE



I have always enjoyed listening to Black Rhodium products, having sold them as well as using them in my systems, particularly the now discontinued Rhapsody. Their clear portrayal of the music got me inspired, particularly the higher frequencies, and use of silver making them particularly good on my valve gear. Set up by Graham Nalty, he has been involved in the design and development and marketing of audio products since 1975 including amplifiers, cables and now components. The Black Rhodium factory is set in Derby where they use selected components and materials with a proven record for sound quality enhancement.

The name Black Rhodium itself was originally a stereo interconnect in which the wire was plated in rhodium, but the name Black Rhodium was arrived at when a particular wire turned black with oxidation, but remained a shiny finish where it had been plated in rhodium. The new Black Rhodium Quickstep loudspeaker cable was inspired by their Thunder cable and uses the same conductor as Foxtrot but is now fitted with the gorgeous looking Graham Nalty Legacy Range GN-1 straight Line Contact rhodium plated plugs (the Foxtrot uses their gold plated Z plugs). Indeed, they developed Quickstep and Harmony due to a customer telling them

that whenever they tried any other cables they always went back to Thunder. That got Graham thinking that Thunder had special properties that the others did not;

“I isolated the differences between Thunder and the other Black Rhodium cables and built a test cable using these features. I then used the same principles to design Quickstep and Harmony, plus a number of other cables”.

On paper, Rhodium might not have such good conductivity as copper or silver, but Graham chose it because he believes it gives the best sound quality, reproducing the speed of the music better and making the music more exciting and dramatic, and revealing much more of the music. In my tests, that speed, excitement and detail of information was certainly profound. Graham once tested interconnects in which the same wire was plated in gold, palladium, ruthenium and rhodium. Rhodium came out best, with palladium and ruthenium about the same, and gold last. To coat the whole of Quickstep with rare metals would be extremely expensive, and therefore silver-plated copper is used, and which works extremely well. Today’s value rhodium is about \$650 for troy ounce (it hit \$10,000 at one point in 2008), whereas

silver is \$19. Incidentally, copper is around \$4500 for a tonne!

Build and Tech

Black Rhodium products have always been keenly priced, showing that excellent quality of build and audio quality can be obtained without selling the house. At £400 for a 3-metre version of Quickstep this is highly competitively priced both in terms of the looks and sound quality achieved. What immediately got me interested in the Quickstep was the flexibility of the cable itself, something that is vital for the orderly homeowner. For two pounds extra the cable braid is also available in white, yellow, red, green or blue if black doesn’t match with your furniture. A lovely thought. Designed to reject RFI and EMI interference as well as vibrations, the cable worked adequately surrounded by all the other cables in my set up. The construction includes the use of two separate and complementary materials to effectively dampen mechanical vibrations. The science of cable making is very complex, not just about the metal or dielectric, and more than just scientific equations concerning L, C and R. I still wonder why some people can still say that all cables sound the same. With all else being equal the lower the capacitance the higher the inductance, and in a crossover capacitors

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block low frequencies and let high frequencies get through. The Quickstep having conductors further apart has an excellent low capacitance at around 80pF for the 3 metres, but the bass is still surprisingly tight and full, and the treble extended and fast. Indeed, cables can work much like your crossover, so it is essential that that you select one to work best with the rest of your equipment. The Quickstep has excellent details and speed particularly in the higher frequencies. Bass was surprisingly detailed and quick. 'Transient Phase Distortion' and 'Proximity Effect' distortion are reduced by using thick insulation which effectively increases the distance between conductors, as well as the braided cable design which reduces the magnetic field created by the two wires. The conductor itself comprises of 16 x 0.2mm diameter silver plated copper wires with silicone rubber insulation. Understanding the design of the cables helped me to back up my audible observations, and whilst, yes, the low capacitance and choice of materials meant the top end would be better, there was no loss of bass.

Sound

Using my Class-A Krell set-up initial listening gave a brilliantly clear and exciting soundstage playing the Polish Classical brass album "Trombastic Tutti Virtuosi" from For-Tune Productions. Silver works well on brass instruments, and this combination gave an exciting and lively rendition of the music.

Whilst the bass wasn't over pronounced it had a sense of energy that many speaker cables are unable to convey well. Imaging is also very detailed and tightly placed within the soundstage, with all music played without stress. David Bowie's "The Next Day" is a real test of detail. This is not my favourite Bowie album but I now felt I wanted to listen to more of it. I always find there is too much compression and limiting in this album with all instruments competing for supremacy and some cables can just exacerbate the situation and make the whole muddy and complex. Quickstep was like cleaning your glasses after they have been covered in finger marks. Everything just opened up and I really began to enjoy these cables. Track 4 "Love is Lost" was particularly well defined and more human, though I did miss some of the "edginess" that gives the track the

emotion and pain that I felt was being portrayed in this track. Listening to the new 180g Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald (Clare Teal, The Syd Lawrence Orchestra) opened up the sound significantly, particularly in terms of separation of the instruments within the soundstage, as well as improving transients of the brass instruments.

Conclusion

Quickstep is keenly priced at £400.00 for a 3m pair complete with the GN-1 Straight Line Contact rhodium plated plugs. For sound per pound this is an excellent choice for the audiophile offering a detailed soundstage with exceptional speed, and a sound that was very open and effortless. Well worth listening to.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent construction and good looking GN-1 straight Line Contact rhodium plated plugs

Sound Quality: Very controlled and extended top frequencies with an effortless but exciting portrayal of the music throughout the full audio range

Value For Money: An extremely good set of results for the price. This is exceptionally good value, though if the price is too high then the cheaper Foxtrot uses the same cable though different plugs

Pros:

Excellent speed of top frequencies.

Openness

Effortless portrayal of the music

Excellent quality of build

Cons:

Some may find the bass is not prominent enough.

Price:

£400.00 for a 3m pair