

Chord Signature Reference

Trickle-down tech from Chord's flagship Sarum has birthed a 'Reference' version of its shielded Signature speaker cable. Review & Lab: **Paul Miller**



Hand built to order, Chord's latest Signature speaker cable looks like the original but features improved conductors and dielectrics and is a mite more flexible too! This 'Reference' version is available in 1.5m pre-terminated lengths at £600, increasing to £2000 for the 5m pair reviewed here. Terminations include 24k gold-plated banana plugs and spade connectors and BFA Camcon connectors, while the nylon braid comes in black/black or, as illustrated here, red/black colourways.

Chord claims that its 2005 Signature was the 'first available speaker cable with high frequency effective shielding', but it was certainly not the first shielded speaker cable. My own lab test records show the graphite-screened QED Incon and braid-screened Silver Sounds 12/2 from 1992, both incorporating drain wires terminated at the 'amp end' of the cable.

There have been various screened cables launched in the meantime but all, as far as I can tell, have the signal and return conductors surrounded by a common shield. Chord's Signature, and today's Reference version, are distinctive because each conductor has its own separate screen, electrically isolated from the other. Moreover, because each conductor is effectively a substantial 10-gauge silver-plated coax with a high quality PTFE dielectric (rather than multiple coaxial cables connected in parallel) and the screen appears to be unconnected to



ABOVE: Like the original Chord Signature cable, the new Signature Reference uses shielded, coaxial signal and return conductors

either end of the cable, there's no penalty to its overall capacitance – just 35pF/m according to my measurements. The loose twisted-pair geometry does push the series inductance up a tad, to 0.9µH/m, but the substantial cross-section of those multi-stranded cores keeps the loop resistance down to a fabulously low 5.9mohm/m. The power loss is just 0.0064dB/m.

brightest brass and spot-lit percussion has slightly less 'reach' even though there's no doubting the balance and composure offered by the cable. Complex classical works were easy to interpret, the cable assisting in the delivery of 'difficult' pieces without stress or strain. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Now in Reference guise, Chord's Signature is a highly developed cable which has evolved to complement similarly civilised systems. It necessarily faces stiff competition at this exalted price level but holds its own with a delivery of power and grace that can make lesser cables appear grainy or uncouth. The combination of low capacitance and resistance also bodes well for its consistent behaviour with a range of different amplifiers.

Sound Quality: 80%



PUNCHY PERFORMER

Thick, low-resistance cables typically retain the impact of the lustiest amplifiers and Chord's Signature Reference is no exception. The fruity kick-drum/bass line of Donald Fagen's *Morph The Cat* [96kHz/24-bit; Warner Music 9362499752] powered from my B&W 802Ds with a punch and purpose that belied the relaxed rhythm of the piece while the multi-tracked vocals sang as clear as day. By comparison, the

LEFT: The gentle twist of each cable's pair of conductors is maintained by an aluminium clamp, fixed 10in from each end