



Atlas Ascent (£see captions)

With its latest Ascent range Atlas has reduced the price of its high-end speaker and interconnect cable offerings while maintaining exemplary construction quality
 Review: **John Bamford**

Based in Kilmarnock, Atlas Cables manufactures a portfolio of cables to suit the pockets of both aspiring audiophiles and fortunate owners of cost-no-object, high-end systems. Ascent is the name of a new range of entry-level 'reference' cables, if you'll forgive the contradiction in terms. Rather than employing the microporous PTFE dielectric material seen in Atlas's expensive Mavros and Asimi cables, Ascent uses fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP). And, no, the conductors are *not* pure silver, rather they're 6N purity multi-strand PC-OCC copper. Build quality is nevertheless fabulous, as we've come to expect from Atlas, featuring the company's proprietary RCA, XLR and hollowed-out 'Z-plug' (4mm banana) connectors that are cold welded in preference to being soldered.

The single-ended (RCA) interconnects are 'pseudo-balanced', featuring symmetrical signal and return conductors, the return path being connected to the outer screen at the source end – consequently they're marked for directionality. The screen comprises an OFC braid combined with an aluminium/ Mylar foil, the whole surrounded in a flexible PVC outer sheath that is further dressed in a grey-coloured woven fabric to add a touch of luxury.

The speaker cables come in two guises: Ascent 2.0 and Ascent 3.5, their nomenclature indicating the overall sizes

(in mm²) of each model's conductors. Ours was the larger 3.5 version constructed of 384 very fine (0.1mm) strands of OCC wire. Outer diameter is 9.8mm. The external PVC sheath is not covered in fabric on the speaker cables, which is a pity – but of course it's how they sound that really counts.

SMOOTH AS SILK

As I still had Atlas's pure silver Asimi speaker cables to hand I was able to compare the considerably more affordable Ascent 3.5s. Where the Asimis sound highly explicit and 'open-mouthed' at high frequencies the Ascents appeared to add

a little softening – not that you'd notice unless doing immediate A/B comparisons in a wide bandwidth system.

Listening to a wonderful hi-res solo piano recording of Dick Hyman playing

"Tain't So" by Bix Beiderbecke [*Thinking About Bix*: Reference Recordings HR-116] I could hear that a touch of sparkle had disappeared, although the resultant sound was far from unpleasant. Low frequency information remained clearly resolved by the Ascent speaker cable, the body of the piano demonstrating fine resonance in the acoustic space of the recording venue.

A musical contrast, 'The Outsider' from A Perfect Circle's *Thirteenth Step* [Virgin CDVUS247] delivered deep, rumbling and detailed electric bass and kick drum with

'They displayed tremendous clarity between DAC and amp'



ABOVE: Symmetrical (balanced) interconnect is priced at £625 for a 1m stereo pair. XLRs are made of brass with OCC connecting pins

great timing. Here the Ascent speaker cable's smoothing of HF proved rather beneficial, removing the sting from splashy, sibilant cymbals that override the recording's 'wall of sound' production.

The Ascent interconnects displayed tremendous clarity between Chord's QBD76HD DAC and my resident Mark Levinson No.383 amplifier. Certainly they proved adequately transparent to reveal the improvement brought by going from single-ended to balanced connection, the latter allowing instruments to appear in the soundstage image from a subjectively darker background. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Build quality is first-rate, such that it's a shame to hide these Ascent cables behind your equipment rack. Both the 3.5 speaker cable and interconnects deliver deep, detailed bass and smooth high frequencies. They're expensive of course, hence the company putting its new Ascent range in its 'reference series'. But if your system is worthy, these cables should ensure you're getting the most from each component.

Sound Quality: 80%



ABOVE: Ascent 3.5 speaker cables cost £675 for a 2m stereo set with Atlas's 'Z-plugs' (shown here). Add around £200 per stereo metre and £80 for custom termination with spade connectors