



EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Atlas Asimi loudspeaker cable

by Alvin Gold

There are some great questions to be asked about audio cables. Do they really sound different? And if they do, how and why? It's also worth asking why they cost as much as they do, but this is not a question that is possible to answer convincingly. It may have something to do with R&D costs, the use of exotic, expensive materials and/or production processes, but equally it may have more to do with distribution issues – if a maker sells only small quantities of cable, it probably can't be done economically. In this case, Atlas makes a convincing case that it is the use of relatively expensive materials and production processes that bear much of the blame, but it is impossible to be sure.

Asimi (which means silver in Greek) takes its inspiration from two sources, first and foremost Asimi interconnect, which was launched about a year ago, and secondly Mavros, the previous flagship incumbent from the Atlas stable.

Asimi takes the idea of OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting), a temperature controlled drawing process, previously used in Mavros) to the next level. Modestly, Atlas claims Asimi is technically and sonically superior to any other loudspeaker cable speaker anywhere and at any price. The aim was to use

pure silver conductors, which Atlas claims are superior to the more usual silver plated copper because it is completely homogenous, but it acknowledges that silver is often criticised for sounding bright and edgy thanks to its homogeneity, which Atlas believes is due in part to the low level presence of impurities in the silver, and also to the granular structure of silver. The use of 99.9999% pure OCC silver

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(OCC stands for Ohno Continuous Casting), also used in the copper conductors used in Mavros, means that the crystal boundaries in normal silver are reduced to about one per 700 feet, so that the audio signals traverse a continuous conductor instead of multiple grain boundaries. Each cable leg in Asimi has two strands of three different conductor diameters giving six strands in all with a total combined cross sectional area of 3.5 mm². ▶

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▶ Perhaps more important still is the design of the insulation, which has an unprecedentedly low dielectric constant of about 1.5 – a perfect insulator (a hard vacuum) is 1.0, and free air, the next best, is about 1.2. PTFE/Teflon in its normal solid form has a DC of about 2.7 – 3.3, but the microporous PTFE, which consists most of air, reduces this by at least 30%. The dielectric constant also translates into transmission speed, and also its uniformity across the audio band, and it is this that marks Asimi out from the rest, with the obvious exception of Nordost Valhalla, which achieves a similar end, but in a completely different way.

And in case you object that the speed of light is a constant, it is only a constant for a particular conductor, for which the traditionally quoted figure is simply an upper limit. The traditional speed of light is normally given as around 300M metres/second, but this is the speed in a vacuum, that is empty space. The conductor in cables acts as a complex network, which has a non-linear impedance characteristic with inductive and capacitive properties, and as a result transmission speed varies with frequency, which in an electrical network can distort the leading edges of signals, especially at the high frequency end of the spectrum. In some (rare) cases the speed of light can dip down to little more than walking speed.

From long experience of Valhalla, and Asimi, it is this speed and uniformity that appear to be the main factors underpinning the way these cable perform. Asimi is undeniably very special, though not necessarily in quite the way I had expected. Sonically it is a fine grain cable, in some respects very like Nordost Valhalla, with which it share some properties, though its construction could hardly be more different. It has real heft and weight, in this respect reminiscent of the previous range topping Mavros. This sense of physical presence and boldness marks it out from the crowd, but so does the complete absence of grain or glare, which Atlas suggests is associated with many pure silver cables.

I am not yet in a position to say whether the sound will deteriorate with time, which is also a charge levelled at some silver cables due to oxidation, but this has not been an issue with Asimi interconnect so far, which I have been using for considerable period. It is also worth noting that so far at least the connectors used on Asimi speaker cable appear to be bullet proof, with a robust cable relief and no obvious signs of wear on the 4mm pins, which has been a persistent problem with Nordost. The cable itself is mechanically sound too: you can't easily kink it by bending it sharply. The only possible potential problem is that at 16mm diameter, it is quite thick, and as a result it may not always be easy to hide.

Asimi is the kind of cable you might want to use for critical listening, for example when comparing CD to SACD, which can and should sound more subtle and expressive, but which sometimes doesn't due to the inherent lack of resolution in many systems, which may be at least partly related to



shortcomings in the cables employed. Consistently, Asimi Speaker cable was able to resolve the fine difference in micro structure that give music its personality, human voice its passion and expression.

Whether you can be justified in spending the kind of money you will be asked for Asimi is not a question that can be readily answered. It is very expensive and you will need to suck it and see, perhaps by borrowing a set from a dealer, which is a service that he should be able to provide against suitable sureties, or large wads of notes of the realm. Generally speaking, the higher the resolution of the system, the more benefit will be derived from the cable. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Price: £8,950/3m pair (custom lengths at £2,400 per metre)

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