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Naim's Super Lumina Cables

MARTIN COLLOMS TRIES OUT NAIM'S LATEST CABLES, EXPRESSLY INTENDED FOR USE WITH THE STATEMENT AMPLIFIER COMBO, BUT ALREADY FINDING APPLICATIONS ELSEWHERE

HIFICRITIC RECOMMENDED

Super Lumina Speaker Cable Data

Prices (stereo pair) + termination (parts & labour)	£600/m

Typical of the care and detail expressed in Naim electronics, the new Super Lumina cable collection is more complex than appears on the surface. Although they have been found to perform well with other manufacturer's components, certain of their technical optimisations are only fully expressed when used with Naim's own amplification.

These cables were specifically designed for the Statement amplifier combo, but Naim indicates that they are also suitable for the company's existing electronics, at any rate where this is appropriate on grounds of cost and performance. In this context the new £1,750 Super Lumina interconnect is something like 2.5 times the price of the established and already quite elaborate Hi-Line interconnect. It also costs considerably more than the company's 'standard' interconnects (typically £100), which are by no means inappropriate for general use.

The price of Super Lumina speaker cable is somewhat complicated by possible variations in length and termination. Although the base price for just the stereo cable is £600/m, the silver-plated custom Naim terminations and the labour involved adds significantly to the cost, so our 7m terminated pair cost about £7,000. Dare we say that this is not untypical of high end speaker cables, and dare we point out that it's actually much less costly than some? But the Super Lumina speaker cables are certainly very much more costly than Naim's very well established (and, ultimately, surprisingly capable) NAC A5, which costs a modest £420 (£30/m) for 2x 7m (unterminated).

Loudspeaker Cable

All Super Lumina cables are direction-coded, if subtly. This is usually less of an issue for the interconnects, where the often differing terminations indicate which end is 'send' and which is 'receive', but it tends to be more significant with the loudspeaker cable, for example when fitted with spades at both ends, as the internal construction is not entirely symmetrical.

The identifying Naim logos, printed onto the little boxes at each end of the cable, do subtly sign signal path direction. Here the top of the Naim logo ought to be positioned in the direction of the source, and we wondered why. Reason one is merely in order to make the results consistent; it's simply a Naim hallmark to leave nothing to chance, and directional effects have often been noticed in cables. Reason two (which is arguably rather more significant) is that the build of the speaker cables is not as symmetrical as at first appears, as a terminating RFI damping resistor is situated at the amplifier end of the business.

This speaker cable is constructed as a closely spaced twin with high current conductors. It's built using an individually insulated multi-parallel strand form, with low molecular weight polyolefin as insulator. Each bundle is first clamped in a sheath and then covered by a conductive screening braid or shield. This braid is not actively connected, save via a low current 10kohm damping resistor (the value chosen for our 7m lengths) interconnecting the floating shields. This will drain away a proportion of any environmental RFI induced in the cable run.

Checking the numbers, measurement gave just 0.089ohm for a 7m loop, which therefore indicates a very low resistance of 0.013ohm/m; this will suit any conceivable speaker. Likewise its capacitance was very low (at about 75picofarad/m), and again will have negligible effect. (I could barely measure the loop inductance due to the floating shields; the meter read 0.08uH/m.) It's usefully physically flexible and compact, also has some mechanical damping, and in all this very high power cable clearly has sound electrical properties.

At first hearing with new Statement I found that the speaker cables demonstrated remarkably good detail, imaging and transparency, with exceptionally good image depth and extraordinary recovery of low

MARTIN COLLOMS

level ambience. Focus was also extremely good in all respects. However, both cable and amplifier were a bit below par for rhythmic expression in the midrange and bass on classical works, and more clearly so in the bass on rock material. This was a worry, although at this point both the Statement and Super Luminas had only been running for a few tens of hours.

In the Statement review I have noted that with some running in and the adoption of a double spur supply (allotting the NAP S-1 its own supply) the power amplifier began to take off handsomely on pace, timing and rhythm, right through the frequency range, substantially helping the Super Lumina speaker cable. However, when compared with the classic NAC A5 cable, despite the latter's mild coloration and clear loss of transparency and image layering, it was clear that the new cable still had some way to go. For the present I regard this assessment as 'work in progress', but it had already matched the standard of several very respected high end cables.

Super Lumina Interconnects

The Super Lumina interconnect cable is manufactured as a channel-bonded stereo pair of screened balanced cables, employing low loss dielectrics and a mechanically self-damped, compliant construction. It may be wired to the available audio plugs (DIN, RCA or XLR) in almost any useful configuration. Discernible gains in clarity, dynamics and rhythm accrue when a cable construction lines up with Naim's traditional approach. Here we note the anti-vibration techniques, the close physical coupling of signal channels, and the hierarchical grounding defined for a Naim audio chain. For example, twin-pair cable construction used in the Super Lumina interconnect reduces the incidence of induced hum and noise by avoiding the usual casual loops that are commonly found among separate L and R channel accessory cables from other sources.

A particular feature of both DIN and XLR plugs is their proprietary Naim construction, which mechanically decouples vibration from the equipment to the cable and vice versa. Called Air-PLUG, this uses multiple aluminium rings to form the rear of the connector, and these are intentionally loosely coupled in order to create an articulating lossy section that inhibits the conduction of vibration. In addition, with the DIN terminations the connector pins make a clearance fit within their custom sockets (while tightly engaging electrically), further damping out any coupled vibration.

These cables are rather more complicated than they first appear, as the signal conductor is a complex

bundle of multi-diameter, individually insulated silver-plated copper conductors, surrounded by a tin-plated copper shield. A soft outer jacket is extruded over the assembly, forming a compliant but closely-spaced stereo pair. This facilitates easy installation whilst inhibiting self and conducted vibration. These cables are optimised for a limited range of lengths, typically 1.5m.

Each signal, return, ground and shield wire is individually specified and manufactured for its particular function. That vitally important ground conductor references the audio band waveform between source and load, mirroring the internal architecture of Naim electronics with its classic linear hierarchical grounding.

Used alongside the Statement amplification, the DIN-to-DIN Super Lumina sounded quite extraordinarily good, building on known strengths of trusted references with exceptional transparency and micro detail, super precise imaging, top class neutrality, and (by no means least) top class rhythm, dynamics and timing. Hitherto I have never heard the NDS/PS555 combo perform as well as this (but will happily concede that its DIN output, as used here with NDS ground 'on', is also its favoured connection and mode). The other Super Lumina interconnect cables with alternative terminations were also found to be very good (for example pre-amp-to-power amp), and performed well up to international audiophile standards, which indicates that they're actually very realistically priced in context. They ran in nicely over just a few days and may therefore be highly recommended.

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AUDIO EXCELLENCE

Super Lumina Interconnect Data (1.5m length)

Capacitance	346picofarads (moderate)
Resistance	0.27ohm/loop (satisfactorily low)
Inductance	<1.5uH (very low)
Prices (stereo single/pair)	from £1,500 – £3,000

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