

## HIGH FIDELITY CT-1 CABLES

Equipment Reviews

In: [June 2012](#)

Patrick Dillon

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The CT-1 interconnects from High Fidelity Cables is the first of a new range of audio cables from Rick Schultz, best known as the brains behind Virtual Dynamics. For those familiar with the old Dynamics cables, the new High Fidelity line is about as different as you can imagine. Where the Virtual Dynamics wire was renowned for its thickness and near impossibility to bend into tight corners, High Fidelity cables are ultra-slim and almost elegant in comparison. You risked fingers (almost) with the magnetic pull between the Virtual Dynamics connectors which more than once locked themselves together in my room with a snap and had to be wrangled apart. However, for his new line, Rick marshalls the intricacies of magnetic forces in a way that is far less hazardous to limbs and much more attractive to the eye.



You can read about Rick's patent-pending Magnetic Conduction Technology at the company's site ([www.highfidelitycables.com](http://www.highfidelitycables.com)) and his views on all things audio in the accompanying interview in this issue, including his explanation for the demise of Virtual Dynamics. Whatever one thinks about cable design, I've always found Rick to be upfront, enthusiastic about audio, and extremely customer-oriented so when he offered to send me a sample of the new interconnect and digital cables to try out, how could I refuse?

The CT-1s are shipped in lightweight wooden boxes with each cable fixed to the bottom of the case via plastic strip holder and the terminations housed in holes bored in the front panel. It makes an impression, which one hopes is not just an attempt to justify the high price here but part of a practical effort at delivering the wire ready to be used. Reading the very short accompanying material one learns that the pins are shipped coated in a special treatment to enhance the connection and one is advised not to touch or wipe the pins before inserting them in your (ideally newly cleaned) component inputs. Despite the presentation efforts, Fed Ex had managed to dislodge several cables from their resting holes, and to bend one pin slightly too, proof positive that despite the best efforts of all packers, the shipping company can always find a way to mess with your goods.

The new cables are available now in single-ended (RCA) form only, a disappointment to me with my customarily fully balanced rig – but not sufficiently so to prevent me from using them. While I try not to get too excited by wires, and really wanted to avoid further cable reviews after a run of them in the last couple of years, I have to say the look and feel of the new cables, particularly their terminations, is almost a sensual pleasure. Longer and more polished than most, the weight and balance of the connectors just feels right in your hand. These 'pinlok' connectors reportedly compress their oversized pin upon insertion via spring tension, ensuring a strong connection with increased contact area. Stop me here, the metaphors are obvious but let me say that in use, these cables just feel better than typical single ended connectors found in other wire.

I put the interconnects in one by one over the course of several weeks until such time as I had a direct CT-1 feed from front end, including digital line between my transport and DAC, to my Spectron power amps. To keep the

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Spectrums running in bridged mono mode, I used a pair of high quality RCA-to-XLR adapters that I'd obtained from Balanced Audio Technology when I ran a VK500 in my reference rig.

## Sound everywhere

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I really don't get why wires should make a difference given their supposedly simple job of transferring signals but one of the repeated experiences I've had in reviewing audio cables over the years is that somehow wires matter more than common sense says they should. And as far as cables making a difference, I've tended to get off the bus relatively early on this long journey by buying, and sticking with, Grover Huffman wire that just makes great music appear from my rig and does not cost a fortune. I've reviewed some really fine cables, most recently having been impressed with the quality on offer from Wywires, a full loom of which I reviewed in the March 2012 issue. Still, good as I've heard other cables to be, I've never doubted that I would get great enjoyment regardless by just sticking with Grover's cables and putting my own money elsewhere in my set-up. I stand by that assessment that the Huffmans are the cables to beat for a couple of hundred dollars but for once, and at the risk of rendering the rest of this review superfluous, I've found my head turned by what is on offer with High Fidelity's new CT-1 line of wire. I cannot justify spending \$1600 on a meter of wire, especially since a typical rig requires several meters to function, but if you asked me now, this instant, to pick the best sounding results I've ever obtained from changing cables in my system, I'd pick the CT-1s without blinking.

If I were to characterize the immediate sonic results of inserting CT-1s into my rig I'd use the word 'smooth,' as this term came to mind when I fitted first the CT-1 as a digital interconnect between my transport and DAC and then continued through the various amplification stages. In comparison with the highly impressive Harmonic Technology HDMI cable I use as a reference, the CT-1 seemed to offer a slightly more polished, easy listen, but perhaps with just a little less resolution in the frequency extremes. Of course, we are not comparing apples with apples here, as the PS Audio digital front end is optimized for HDMI connection according to the manufacturer and I've used it this way since I purchased mine. PS Audio claim the coaxial is just not as good a connection standard as their proprietary I2S (HDMI) link. A fairer comparison might be the older TARA Labs RSC digital coaxial I keep



for use in my secondary rig which was a fairly high-priced cable a decade ago. No surprises here if I tell you the High Fidelity Cable is much closer in sound to my reference HDMI cable and if I had to listen to my digital front end using the High Fidelity Cables coaxial rather than the recommended HDMI connector, I came to feel that this would be no great problem, that its smoothness has real charm and, if I am not mistaken, the CT-1 seems to widen the soundstage presentation slightly between the speakers. On all other musical attributes the comparison was very close though, and I was helped by the use of the PS Audio remote which allowed for real-time shifting between cables while music played. Without instant switching, I think I could live happily with either cable, which was not the case with other cables, including PS Audio's own HDMI wire which I found inferior to the Harmonic Technology Rev 1.4a over several months of listening. That said, my default is the excellent Harmonic Tech cable which I think has a special synergy with the PS Audio gear.

The real test however was connecting the DAC to the preamp and then continuing the path onto the power amps where one could really get a handle on how the CT-1 contributed to the musical reproduction in parts or all of my rig. Another advantage of the PS Audio Perfect Wave DAC is its ability to be connected with both single ended and balanced outs (though this 'advantage' came to be something of a headache over time, as I'll explain). Thus, connecting each one to a different input on my preamp I could also hear the effect of the wires at this stage of the chain. So now, not only could I compare the coaxial to HDMI, I could compare each of these in combination with a balanced interconnect or High Fidelity's CT-1 single-ended cable between DAC and preamp. Yes, switching and more switching ensued to try to get a handle on this, complicated by two issues: the VRE-1 preamp I use has no remote control and the volume differences between XLR and RCA outputs required some adjusting. As you might appreciate, one gets tired of too many back and forth comparisons under these conditions and switching sessions would last only for so long before I settled on one and listened at length before switching. Of these four conditions, if you controlled for volume, blindfolded me and told me to listen, I'd happily report any combination seemed to work well. Again, if pushed, I say the all CT-1 just had the edge in smoothness and air, while the HDMI and Huffman XLR seemed to have a slightly greater emphasis in bass. Trust me when I tell you, after a few minutes of regular listening, I'd often have to double check settings to be sure of what combination of connections I was hearing. Differences there were but it's really hard to say one presentation was more correct or accurate, they both made for very pleasurable listening and I would have trouble consistently ranking these combinations in

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terms of preference. So, perhaps my commitment to HDMI and XLR interconnects had been called into question, which should tell you something about how good these wires sounded.

Where the High Fidelity cables had greatest impact was in the preamp to power amp stage. Here, the smoothness which I had identified in the coaxial wire was true of the regular interconnects too but not in a way that might suggest any loss of detail. Instead, these cables did something dramatic to the resolution of certain instruments on very familiar recordings. Tord Gustavson's work is a great vehicle for examining changes in my rig and I pick one or two of his early trio recordings on ECM every review cycle for such purposes. That the music is wonderful doesn't hurt either. Drummer Jarle Vespestad is a master of using percussion to add space and punch to moody instrumentals and in contrast to most drummers, he can exploit cymbals in ways that require the listener to pay attention to catch the nuances in the music. I've listened to 'Being There' (ECM, 2007) literally hundreds of times with multiple components and cabling systems but I have never heard the delineation of Vespestad's cymbal work so clearly outlined. The CT-1s seemed to open up the soundstage to reveal the trio with a little more room for each instrument to occupy. This particularly affected the presentation of cymbals floating free from the bass and piano to have a clearer role in the overall sonic interplay between the musicians. But it was not just the presentation of cymbals. The track "Karmosin" from this album opens with the drums, unaccompanied, sparsely indicating, in absence of a clear rhythm or meter, that something is coming. The first listen caught my ear and had me hit the 'back' button a couple of times to check what I was hearing, so realistic did this stop-start roll across the various drums sound to my ears.

At the other end of the frequency range, the CT-1s offer a very clear bass articulation that might at first sound 'less' than competitors (and which might be reflected in my comments on the front end cable differences above) but on repeated close listening reveals itself as exceptionally balanced. A check I always make when listening to bass on rock and jazz recordings is how well I can follow the bass guitar alone while other instruments and vocalists pile into the mix. The idea here is to identify every bass note in isolation rather than as part of a merged 'low-note' punch that typifies such reproduction on less than excellent speakers and rigs. Again and again, with the CT-1 in the loop, and particularly when feeding the Spectron monos, the clarity of bass reproduction was superb, to the point where I could follow along with the instrumental line in isolation from kick-drum, electric guitar or organ on such well-listened to recordings as Ronnie Earl's Grateful Heart or Holly Cole's Temptation.

The latter recording is a test for any system. If, like me, you love Cole's voice on this album, closely-mic'd to create an intimacy of reproduction in your room, then listening is its own reward but as a review tool, this recording contains some basic arrangements that can highlight strengths or weaknesses of your system pretty quickly. I once returned a pair of speakers I'd purchased online on the basis of a bass anomaly I heard within seconds of playing "Train Song" from this album. The lumpy, booming sound that came from one speaker indicated something was not right, and sure enough, the company checked and found an internal wiring problem, sending me a new corrected pair without fuss. The acoustic bass on this album is recorded in a manner that makes it hard to ignore, for both good and bad reasons. When reproduced well it's almost live in your room but if not, it can boom and hang around ruining all timing in the music. If you want help positioning your speakers where you are not working against the room, try this album. To say I was impressed with the CT-1s when listening to this album would be an understatement. Full, rich stand-up bass emerged with a sense of placement, natural decay, instrumental body and not a hint of boom. In fact, this is the best I have ever heard this album reproduced in my room and I could almost see bassist David Piltch digging in to the strings in places to add dynamic drive, or lightening off with his right hand to soften the attack on the strings. Here was one recording where switching back and forth between an all-CT-1 line and a comparison combo left me in no doubt about the joys of this single provider loom.

The trick that the CT-1 seems to pull off is fascinating. It is both simultaneously smooth, almost to the point of being lush in the upper frequencies, but having a resolution of detail, particularly in the mids and bass frequencies that makes listening a really sensual pleasure. On old familiar recordings I'd find myself noticing some odd detail that had not registered before; a handclap the before had seemed part of the drum sound, a drum whack that was clearly tom-tom not kick, an organ line that didn't actually fade out but kept going behind the guitar until the track ended etc. These are the small details that had me often going back and forth to see if I could hear it with the others and wondering, if I could, why I had not noticed it before when it appeared to make more sense of the music when perceived. Cables always seem to require close listening to catch these nuances but not so the CT-1s, I got some of their changes loud and clear from the outset.

The key point here though is not so much details as the overarching presentation. The CT-1 cables do seem to extend the soundstage in a way that is most obvious in the left-right front plane. Sitting in my sweet spot I more than once glanced up, drawn to what seemed impossible, a sound coming from beyond the outside edge of my right or left speaker, the latter's position no longer being the fixed outer boundary of my soundstage. Oddly, it seemed as if the soundstage between the speakers was also bigger, which is not a very good way of explaining what I hear with these cables, and might in fact be a function of increased depth of soundstage, I cannot be sure but I know I enjoyed what I was hearing.

## Conclusion

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Over several years of reviewing cables there is only so much you can say about what they do. Supposedly the simplest part of your set up, they can cost sums that make little obvious sense while actually impacting the quality of the final product you hear. I do hear subtle and sometimes not so subtle differences between wire in my reference rig, less so in my secondary rig of old, very affordable components. I've called it as I've heard it in every review and settled myself with excellent value Huffman interconnects and Harmonic Tech specialist digital cable. I still love that set up with my gear but I cannot deny that the new High Fidelity Cables do something that others I have tried do not, they simply enable my system to reproduce music as well as I've ever heard in my room.

I won't attempt to justify the price of \$1600 for a meter (\$200 per half meter extra) which render them the most expensive I've used in my system. A full set up for my system would cost nearly \$7k, and that would not get me power cords or speaker cables which currently High Fidelity do not offer. Crazy prices for sure, but I cannot deny they also produced the best sound I've heard in my own rig as a result of an interconnect change. What more can be said? I am sure this annoys some otherwise sane people but that's what I heard. Now, if only someone could explain how all this works!

## Associated Equipment

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- Digital-PS Audio PWT/PWD digital front end combo, or Denon 2900 into Parasound DAC 2000,
- Analog-SME 20/2 w/ SME309 arm, Clearaudio Concerto, Whest PS.30RDT phono stage
- SMCaudio VRE-1
- Spectron Musician III Mk 2 bridged monos with Bybee Upgrade
- Von Schweikert VR5SE
- Elrod custom-made single runs, home-made 14awg, Spitz Anti-Cables, WyWires speaker cables
- Grover Huffman interconnects, Wywires, Elrod and Spectron Thunderbolt power cords

## Manufacturer and specifications

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- High Fidelity Cables
- CT-1 Interconnect: \$1600 for 1m, \$200 per half-meter extra. Single ended only. Digital cable, \$800 per meter
- <http://www.highfidelitycables.com/>

## Readers' comments

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dave smith  
July 3, 2012  
[Reply](#)

Mr. dillon..I,too, have recently tried and adopted Rick's CT-1 interconnects. I have had the ability to try some of what are thought to be some of the best, and in some cases, most expensive cables in the industry, most at 3-6 times the cost of the CT-1s. I have a superb system that has the ability to reveal the greatness, and sometimes the not so great qualities of cables. I have always been one who thought that 'more expensive was better' and do admit to being somewhat of a cable junky. I love to try different cables in my system as my main gear is established and not going to be changed anytime soon if ever. I read most if not all of the early posts on Rick's cables on the net and was taken by many of the audiophiles who bought them replacing cables costing many times the cost of the CT-1s. That went against my views and I had to try them. Long story short, I now have 3 of the CT-1s. one from my First Sound preamp to my Chalice Audio 'Grail' SET monoblocks and one each from 2 sources, a Meitner CD-SA SE and my PS Audio PWD MK II. I have not heard interconnects that so naturally allow the music to flow and that reveal all the nuances of the music. The bass is so very quick and as you have alluded to, increases the soundstage, in my case both laterally and deep. Vocals are more natural with a wonderful intonation. Anyway..i'm rambling but to me, Rick has come up with an amazing cable that bests many cables costing many times the price of the CT-1. I,for one, will be very interested in trying his speaker cables which he is currently working on...thanks..Dave

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[Patrick Dillon](#)  
July 12, 2012  
[Reply](#)

Thanks for the note Dave, glad you had a similar experience. If Rick has speaker cables in the works, we'd love to review them in due course.

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