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Rolls Royce

Text and photography: Knut Vadseth

There are faster cables and there are more expensive cables. There are possibly even "better" cables. However, these hand-made quality cables feel like the Rolls Royce of cables, and not only for their extremely exclusive sound quality, which offers both weight as well as a calm and polished listening experience.

It is said about the Rolls Royce that those who ask for the price of these luxurious, hand-made English cars can't afford one. The same applies to these exquisite luxury cables from Swedish manufacturer Jorma Koski. They will hardly qualify as "best buy", and the manufacturing of such expensive cables may even be disputed, but to say that these cables aren't worth the money shows both lack of empathy towards people with a larger bank account than you, and maybe also an ever-higher passion for music?

Fantastic sound bouquet

To my ears, there is no doubt that these are AMONG the "best" cables I have ever had the honour to lay my hands on, with a bunch of positive sound-wise parameters which have made various sound systems sound clearly better. An accident? Hardly!

What really makes me wonder is how one of these cables, between a DVD player and a reasonable amplifier, not only plays with more weight and calm, but SIMULTANEOUSLY gives an easy feeling of airiness and transparency. What is strange is that a lot of the noise we alternately call jitter, radio interference, acoustic feedback, overload tendencies, plus all the other junk audible as crushed glass in the high mids, simply disappears. And we're talking about changing a single, high-quality, balanced signal cable between a player and an amplifier to a Jorma Prime!

Undoubtedly, more is happening here than we would have expected from a conductor between two points. This difference is so clear that simply everybody will spontaneously and immediately not only register the difference, but also point out which one is more musical, with high certainty. This applies to everybody except hi-fi nerds on their way to a Sc.D. in electronic engineering, who can't "hear" differences not present in theory, or that can't be calculated with a complicated equation.

Buy now?

Cables are a major problem for us at Fidelity. With our own ears, we, on the one hand, experience unexpectedly large differences in sound between different cables. On the other hand, we also hear an irritating correspondence between the price and the quality.

For this reason, we have no trouble defending the view that cables might be as important to the sound as any other component, and even be the main component in the sound chain. They may even cost the same amount of money—a quarter of the total budget, that is. To some, this means cables for 500-600 dollars, while to others a price of over 15,000 dollars might be a “reasonable” investment. This is regardless of how silly this might seem to some sober enthusiasts, who have never had any “faith” in cables. Isn’t a cable just a special conductor that costs a dollar per meter at the local electrician’s?

But if we barely can approve spending 5000 dollars in total for cables for a 20,000-dollar system, we have difficulties accepting the “purchase” of cables for 20,000 dollars or more to a system totalling over a hundred thousand dollars. An increasing number of our readers have systems in that price range. As is our reference system, which is our tool for bringing out the sound qualities of tested equipment. In this system we now use Valhalla all the way, even if we often try out other cables.

An increasing number of our readers get speakers for around 30-40,000 dollars, and amplifiers (including preamp) in the equivalent price range or even higher. And the exclusive dCS digital rig is allegedly sold at several times this price at the very least, including the external atom clock to keep track of the digital signal. Even the most expensive TEAC player with built-in preamp, coming in at 75,000 dollars, has already been acquired by several of our readers!

So why not cables for the unheard-of price of 37,000 dollars—the price of the Jorma Prime set—if you have a system costing nearly 150,000 dollars, and with which you are better equipped to hear various sounds? Is it just because they are “only” a conductor and you are afraid of being deceived? Don’t you trust your own senses?

Valhalla vs. Prime

Even with my “romantic” predisposition to the warm sound balance of Transparent Audio Reference cables, I have slowly begun to prioritise Valhalla speaker cables, and not the least, Valhalla signal cables. The latter are irritatingly cumbersome, 2-meter-long things—all for the sake of good sound—but do they have an even more positive effect on the sound than the speaker cables? The combination sounds far from hard and thin, as so many claims, but is it comparable to driving a Ferrari instead of, well, a Rolls Royce? On good roads, the qualities of a Ferrari are superior, but if you are able to slow down, a Rolls Royce is more comfortable when the surface gets bumpy...

I expect to get the least effect from the mains cables, since I have found other excellent and more reasonable cables that are “almost” as good. The power line conditioner “Tor” was not in the reference system at this time, as it was more useful in the cinema attic.

When I changed both the signal (between the CD player and the preamp and between the preamp and the power amp) as well as the speaker cables, from Valhalla to Jorma Prime, I experienced a clear sound improvement, which was rather subtle but clearly positive and discernible in my view. And it had to do with lots of other things than a dark or light sound balance. A number of other things occurred that had more to do with the phase, harmonic, and other forms of distortion phenomena that most of us “translate” to an uneven frequency response.

Plus the feeling of “resolution”, the psychologically difficult parameter indicating how much detail one gets. But in contrast to the beliefs of the majority of the population, the sound

does become warmer and increasingly smoother, with more detail—not "sharper" or more intrusive.

And one of the most important details is to separate the direct sound from the acoustics of the recording room.

And the winner is...

When changing both signal and speaker cables from Valhalla to Jorma Prime, I spontaneously felt the sound becoming more "luxurious". It sounded "more expensive", according to all the prejudices this expression contains. It is like coming in to a first class restaurant compared to a canteen. In one room, the light is warm, with many local bright spots, creating intimacy and harmony, while the canteen has a few ice-cold and glaring neon lights in the ceiling, floodlighting the room.

In several ways, the Prime sounds exactly the way I have imagined the ideal mix of Valhalla's speed, extreme bandwidth, and glittering details to be, but with fuller body and foundation in the lower frequencies and a more laid-back top end. This we all simply love: Transparent Reference at its best. I have clung to Transparent because of its total lack of the last residues of technical squeaking, a thin film of metallic sound that I often get with Valhalla, either because of the cable or other factors apparent in the sound chain. But the price to be paid for avoiding this is, obviously, lower resolution, airiness, and crispiness.

With Prime, there were no dark corners, and there was considerably more air and light than with Transparent (note: my cables are of the older type) and with an unbelievably smooth and fine-grained treble.

However, the biggest surprise, since Transparent sounds darker and thereby "deceives" the ear, is that the sound was even smoother, more finely grained, and generally, simply better than with Valhalla. At the same time, we all believed the sound to be louder after changing the cables. But the preamp had not even been touched!

To me and my ears, there was no doubt: I'd prefer Jorma Prime if the price was not of importance. We yet have to arrange another duel when Nordost releases its Odin, which is even more expensive than Jorma Prime.

Conclusion

A complete set of hand-made Jorma Prime signal and speaker cables will cost as much as an average car. But this cable is no Ford, it is really the Rolls Royce of cables. If you can't afford a complete set, it is very useful to know that you can borrow a set of signal cables. Very often we experience that the signal cable between the CD and the preamp is the most dominant cable of the chain. If you connect Jorma Prime here and have good cables elsewhere, I believe that you are in for a major jaw drop.

Even with reasonably good equipment, a single Jorma Prime cable will raise the sound quality as much as most other upgrades at the same price! I guarantee column space to all those who can confirm or refute this statement with a practical test. We only have to hope that good electronic engineers also read this and get a degree in WHY cables have so much influence on the sound, rather than stubbornly claim that it is only our imagination flying high with the help of the high price...