

EQUIPMENT REVIEW



Crystal Cable Absolute Dream (Part Two)

By Alan Sircom

In the first episode of this tale of Extreme Wire, we looked at the impact just one Absolute Dream cable can have on a system. While the cable in question (USB) can be taken out of context, *Hi-Fi+* has always espoused the importance of using the same cable family throughout, and Absolute Dream is head of the Crystal Cable family.

The basic layout of the cable is common throughout the Absolute Dream family, although there is a slight difference in construction between the USB and Firewire cables and the rest of the line; to recap, it's an all-monocrystal design, with each

conductor being made from a central solid core of silver with layers of Kapton and PEEK dielectric, with a braid formed of a mix of silver-plated copper and gold-plated silver, which is then wrapped in a translucent outer sleeve. These conductors are then further woven together before being terminated using very high quality connectors, and each cable comes with its own jewel-like ID lozenge. It's easy to mistake this identifier as some kind of damping device or even a special network (in the manner of MIT or Transparent Audio), but the reality is it's just there for show and to give each cable a serial number.

Crystal Cable knows the secret of elegant brand management. Like all Crystal products, these are sold in some of the most refined packaging you'll see in audio today. The Absolute Dream is boxed as if it were a Tiffany necklace rather than an audio cable. While there will always be those who resent such packaging on principle, if you are buying into something this luxurious, a bit of luxury in all aspects is to be expected. ▶



► Deluxe packaging aside, what Absolute Dream represents is the ultimate expression of a team that has the resources (both financial and scientific) and the engineering skills required to design a cable as uncompromising as this. Absolute Dream is not the kind of thing you could summon up from an engineer's cable catalogue, and it's not some microwave transmitter cable retasked for hi-fi use. It's the current pinnacle of years and years of R&D from both Siltech and Crystal Cable (husband and wife team, remember), in a product design without compromise. It's punishingly expensive to make, equally punishingly expensive to own and isn't the kind of product line that will disappear overnight or change with the seasons. This is a substantial investment and one that will be at the top of the cable tree for some time.

Crystal suggests 100 hours of burn in prior to serious listening, and also suggests the direction of the cables is not initially 'fixed', but fixes over time as signal is passed. Perhaps the two are related. Either way, it's academic in this case – the cables are so expensive, just one set were available for UK reviewers and these have been passed from reviewer to reviewer, and mine came pre-conditioned. So if there is a change in performance in the early hours of listening, they came and went long before I got the Absolute Dream. I tried using them both ways, and didn't hear much in the way of directionality, however.

When appropriately partnered, the two main (and immediate) presenting characteristics of Absolute Dream are consistency and presence. Consistency in

that the basic Absolute Dream performance parameters that applied as much to the USB as it does to the interconnects, speaker cables and even power cords. Second is that presence. It's a feeling of complete control over the sound; not overblown or stilted or even creating the wrong-sized imagery. Just, that it gets things as they should be sounding. It's uncanny; it doesn't 'pretty up' the music played, but it just seems to bring the best out of even the worst albums – 'Take Five' by the Sachal Studios Orchestra is a fantastic concept (a Pakistani orchestra, complete with sitar and tabla performing jazz standards), but the sound can be a bit 'toppy'; the Absolute Dream doesn't smooth over that brightness, just makes it more acceptable. It also produces images wide and clear of the boxes should the recording call for that. It's just not about the recording taking place, but also the performance that justified the need for a recording in the first place.

Wannabe musicians wanting to learn a piece of music by ear would love the way Absolute Dream handles music for them; not only does it separate out the individual lines of the mix like your speakers had become monitors, but it also lays open the phrasing of the musicians in a way that's usually obscured ►

► by the rest of the system. This applies no matter how sparse the recording: even the old Elvis at Sun album unveiled insights into Scotty Moore's playing that I've been trying to crack for years. I now know what it is... but it doesn't mean I can play it like Scotty Moore could!

Some cables seem to have a centre of excellence; the other cables follow on from that one great wire. It's here where Absolute Dream stands out, because it's all centres of excellence. Start with an interconnect, you'll feel the urge to add more Absolute Dreams to the power and speaker ends. Start with the speaker cable, and the same happens. Ditto power lead. Even the USB – USB being the one region where cable family ties begin to go a bit dysfunctional – has that ability to make listeners think Crystal Cable Absolute Dream is the all-system choice.

Absolute Dream also has a telephoto effect on the differences in almost all other cables. If you are standing 1m from one person and 6m from another, the latter will look smaller than the former in a photograph taken with a standard lens. If you strap on a long lens and walk back 200m, the two will appear to be standing shoulder to shoulder, despite still standing 5m apart. In the cable world, this means the difference between two 'merely' superb cables become trivial, next to the difference between them and Absolute Dream. This applies universally, too; climbing down from the place where everything in the system costs as much as a Mercedes and to a place where high-end begins, the difference between Absolute Dream and the others is just as large. In fairness, all described above happens when you start experimenting with the big 'O' – Nordost's Odin – but with a different overall presentation. Odin is hyper-detailed and hyper-focused, where Absolute Dream is all about power and image separation. These are two thoroughbreds nose-to-nose at the finish line, and both deserve equal attention if you are looking for the best.



I find the Crystal Cable Absolute Dream a potentially impossible act to follow, and that's not a good place for a reviewer. Having a benchmark set so high that the differences between most (even reasonably 'spendy') cables seem insignificant probably invalidates me from making accurate value judgements about cables at a less breathless price and performance level. For me, the name is entirely apposite; it's an Absolute high-water-mark in a cable reviewer's career and at a price so lofty I can't even afford to Dream about it. As such, the net result of living with Absolute Dream for a while is I probably need to find a new cable guy. Rewiring your whole system with Absolute Dream is so far ahead of the pack, I'm not sure you can find a way back to the 'ordinary' world. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Each conductor: Monocrystal silver core, Kapton and PEEK dielectric, gold-plated silver and silver plated copper monocrystal braid.

CrystalSpeak Absolute Dream loudspeaker cable: £23,220/2m pair

CrystalConnect Absolute Dream interconnect cable: £10,690/1m phono/XLR pair

CrystalPower Absolute Dream power cord: £9,830/1.5m

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