



SECRETS of Home Theater and High Fidelity

Product Review - Analysis Plus Oval-12 Speaker Cables - March, 2000

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Analysis Plus Oval-12
Speaker Cable

Configuration: 8 Foot Single
Wire Pair

MSRP: \$151 Per Set

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For the past two-and-a-half months, I've had the privilege to be the first reviewer to critically evaluate a new, high-performance speaker cable from Analysis Plus. I formed an opinion about these cables quickly, but I continued listening and comparing because I wanted to be sure of what I was hearing. Now, I'm sure. In my humble yet resolute opinion, these cables are a value like no other. I can't wait to tell you more about them. But, as is all the rage with audio reviewers today, I'll continue with this clever (not!) introduction that hopefully ties back to the topic of my review.

The Real World?

In the early 80's of the last century, Music Television (MTV) actually played music videos, at least most of the time. Fast-forward to today, where MTV refuses to let those pesky music videos get in the way of their new "programming". The hot trend now is variations on the theme of "reality programming". The premise of the reality-based shows is that you put a bunch of people together and film what they do for a long time, then edit it down to a once-a-week, 30-minute thriller. And yes, guilty pleasure, I'd rather watch most of them than network news, but that's another story.

The most noteworthy show of MTV's "reality programming" lineup is called The Real World. In it, MTV recruits a group of six to eight kids who range in age from about 18 - 22 and are in various stages of late-to-post teen angst. To spice things up, they are a group of diverse race, gender, sexual preference, and opinion. MTV brings the group together to live in a fully stocked mansion in low-rent cities like Honolulu, San Francisco, Boston, and New York. The producers then find the kids cool jobs and take them on exotic trips – the cameras roll the entire time. Again, let me remind you, this show is called The Real World . . . say what? As you can imagine, what's caught on tape does not even vaguely resemble the real world as we all know it. Fun, but very much unreal.

In my effort to identify "the real world", that's definitely strike #1.

The same goes for a review that I read a while back in an unnamed audio publication of an 8' pair of speaker cables retailing for roughly \$900. These were described as being priced for "the real world", to use that reviewer's words. Hmmmm . . . in exactly which real world are \$900 speaker cables the tool of the common folk? That is not an unreasonable amount to pay for ultimate performance, but at the same time, it sure as heck isn't priced for "the real world". I don't know about you, but I could ask 20 friends who are not in the audio hobby (assuming I have 20 friends, which may be a stretch) whether they thought it was realistic to pay \$900 for a set of speaker cables – they would absolutely laugh out loud.

Yikes! There goes strike #2. One more poor example of "the real world" and I am out.

OK, try this one: the [*Analysis Plus Oval-12 speaker cable*](#).

Price: Very affordable

Real World index: Definitely high

Real World Performance Level: Stellar

Welcome to the premier published review of the Analysis Plus Oval-12, in fact, the first published review of any Analysis Plus product. I'm glad to be the one who brings you this review because, if you're in the market for speaker cables, you will soon thank me for turning you on to Analysis Plus.

You say you want a revolution?

More than once, the word “revolutionary” pops up in my notes for this review. That’s a dicey term because these cables aren’t revolutionary in the sense that they break any laws of physics, or perform any hoodoo-vooodoo magic; rather, they are revolutionary in that they perform as they do for the price at which they are sold. Really, I haven’t seen or heard anything quite like them before at this price, so in that sense, I consider them revolutionary.

Of course, price, by itself, means little in the world of high performance audio. We’ve all seen some messed-up retail pricing and wondered how the manufacturer possibly came up with the figures. Many consumers of high performance audio must feel like Uncle Sam while the audio manufacturers come across like the guys that sell us \$4,000 hammers and \$8,500 toilet seats – those profiteering buggers! To make matters worse, price doesn’t always equate with performance. More often than not, price is a fair predictor of performance, but not always. With the Analysis Plus Oval-12, however, we have a product that breaks some serious pricing rules, all to the benefit of you, the value-conscious consumer, notwithstanding the fact that there are some really fantastic cables out there at very high prices, and worth it.

I fancy myself a bit of a bargain-hunter in all areas audio, especially in cable. For example, I have a pair of build-‘em-yourself interconnects in house right now from Electronic Tonalities called Entwined that retail for \$49/meter. I have no qualms using them at any location in my system – they are that good. Along those same lines, over the past four years, I have owned and enjoyed two speaker cables in my system that I felt set the bar really high in terms of price-to-performance – the D.H. Labs Silver Sonic and the Audiodyne Wavelength. Any shortcomings I heard in my system would not typically be blamed on the speaker cable. I was happy with what I had and viewed both as great cables for the money or otherwise, especially the Audiodyne. Then came the Analysis Plus Oval-12, and my perception of the price-to-performance scale was shifted radically and for good.

The 8’ pair of Analysis Plus Oval-12 that I’ve been listening to are \$151 retail. Let me say that again -- \$151 retail. Yes, you read that right. No, I didn’t forget a zero at the end. And yes, they are killer. I don’t know what you were planning to spend on new speaker cables, but, unless you are flush with the kind of money that buys the absolute best and most esoteric cables, subtract the price of these from what you’ve budgeted, and go immediately to the nearest music store and spend the difference on some cool, new music.

Description

Physically, the Oval-12 offend no one by offering a nice look and solid, if unspectacular, spade lugs. The cable is not particularly thick, but they don’t feel cheap in any way. They are an ergonomic dream as far as speaker cables go, being eminently flexible and therefore simple to route anywhere you want them to go.

The Oval-12 represents the entry-level offering in the Analysis Plus line of speaker cables. The next cables up the ladder are the Oval-9 (\$299/8 ft. pair) and the Silver

Oval (\$499 8/ft. pair). Oh, drat! Where can I go from this review in terms of praiseful prose if I ever have the good fortune to audition those cables? Maybe in addition to cables sound so darn good. Basically, what they are saying is that by using the hollow oval design, they are minimizing current bunching, and therefore, the impedance is the same across the audible frequency spectrum, and the various frequencies all arrive at the speaker at the same time. In particular, the Analysis Plus designs are optimized to make sure the high frequencies make it to the speakers, instead of being impeded more than the low frequencies are. By the way, I also have a set of the Analysis Plus Silver Oval interconnects in house with a follow-up review forthcoming. While they aren't the incredible bargain that the Oval-12s are, my initial impression is that their interconnects are as good as anything I've had in my system, so it's not as if Analysis Plus just got lucky with the Oval-12.

The Performance

What the Analysis Plus Oval-12 simply does better than other speaker cables that I've heard in my system are three things: dynamics (micro especially), bass, and coherence. Try Patricia Barber's new live album on Blue Note called "Companion" for pretty good examples of each. As I took notes for this review, my comments were littered with observations about these three aspects of music reproduction. Typically, they were accompanied by adjectives that were variations on the theme of "outstanding".

I should also emphasize that the dynamics, bass, and coherence that I hear with the Oval-12 aren't the "sound" of the cables at all. Cables shouldn't sound like anything if they're designed properly. What the Oval-12s did to distinguish themselves, however, was to allow my gear to demonstrate the important aspects of music reproduction in a way that speaker cables before them did not. Listening to the Oval-12, I realized that my system always had the potential to make more realistic, involving, and emotionally powerful music, but other speaker cables were holding it back, so it seems.

Speaking of my system, I have to say that the Manley Labs Stingray Integrated amplifier, driving the amazing Silverline Audio SR-15 speakers (review forthcoming), connected by Analysis Plus Oval-12 speaker cables is a smashing combo. Music in the home can be wonderful when components lock-in together and really find a groove – this combination does all that and more, for me.

I should point out that my setup went from using 12' speaker cables to now using 8' speaker cables because of a change in the amplifier location to between the speakers from its prior location nearly behind the right front speaker. The shortening of the speaker cables has possibly contributed to the better sound that I'm hearing since installing the Oval-12, but I'm not sure to what extent. Typically, the shorter the speaker cable the better, so take that change in the system's setup for what it's worth as you read this review.

Are there drawbacks to the Oval-12? I'm hard pressed to point out shortcomings, but if I had to it would be a slight lessening of midrange presence compared to other cables I've had in house for extended periods. Or, maybe my prior cables made things sound a bit plump in the midrange, a coloration that I didn't really hear until the Analysis Plus

arrived and revealed neutrality – I dunno’. Also, soundstage width with the Analysis Plus is about the same as I’ve heard with other cables, but not necessarily better (depth, however, is considerably better). Those are about the only nits that I can pick, folks, and I hate to even mention them because they are so minor.

It’s also worth pointing out that I haven’t had the various high-end “crème de la crème” speaker cables in my system for comparison to the Oval-12. By that I mean brands that most mainstream audiophiles would consider “the best”, on a cost-no-object basis. Accordingly, my opinion of the Oval-12 is based only on what I’ve heard in my system and what I compared them to. I am fairly certain that there are other great cables out there that cost more than the Oval-12, that do “this or that” better. But, I just haven’t heard any in my system.

Along those same lines, what I haven’t mentioned until this point in the review is that, in addition to the D.H. Labs and Audiodyne cables that the Analysis Plus were up against, I also borrowed a friend’s much higher priced speaker cable from MIT. Now MITs are no slouches, and there are many of you reading this who probably have them as your reference. I didn’t have the MIT installed for long, so my comments may be premature, but the Analysis Plus just left them in the dust. It was not close. The superiority of the Analysis Plus was evident. There are more comparisons I’d like to do, with other worthy competition, but for now I’m real comfortable saying that the performance of the Analysis Plus Oval-12 needs no apologies in any sonic parameter that’s important to me. Remember though, sonic preferences in cables are very personal and varied. That is why there are so many different types of cables out there that continue to do well in the sales department. But, for me, the Oval-12s are truly wonderful.

Conclusion

Before our fearless leader and editor John Johnson Jr. had an opportunity to turn his editing pen loose on this review, I inserted the preceding two paragraphs. This was part of my self-imposed editing that amounted to a tone-down, really. My first draft was even more enthusiastic about the Analysis Plus Oval-12, so much so, that I feared readers would not be able to take me seriously. Well, music lovers, take me seriously. You may have a hard time accepting that \$151 is all you really have to spend on top notch speaker cables, but for most of us it’s probably true.

The Analysis Plus Oval-12 is one of the surest and simplest recommendations I can make. If you are interested in value, without compromising any aspect of performance, check these out. Oh, and be sure to hurry before the guys at Analysis Plus wise up and decide to price these cables for the “real world”.

- Paul Knutson -