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Review Follow-Up

Analysis Plus Copper Oval Interconnects, Oval 9 Speaker Cables and Power Oval Power Cords

by Doug Blackburn

Analysis Plus cables are well known to *SoundStage!* readers, but this is our first look at the Copper Oval interconnect and Power Oval power cord. The Oval 9 speaker cable was [previously reviewed](#) in June 2000 and received our [Reviewers' Choice](#) designation. Rather than solid, stranded round or flat conductors,



Analysis Plus conductors are braided hollow ovals. Analysis Plus has lots of information on their website that shows how much more uniformly audio signals move through their hollow-oval conductors across the full range of frequencies. The largest benefit appears to be in the high frequencies, where the Analysis Plus cables appear to pass test signals like square waves to a greater extent and where uneven distribution of charges does not exist as it does with other conductor shapes.

Analysis Plus has been known to demo their cables at shows with a square-wave generator connected to a storage oscilloscope. They are quite happy to show the superior square-wave performance of their cables compared to a selection of brand-name cables you would probably recognize. No listening tests, just the very difficult-to-reproduce-correctly square wave and a 'scope that lets you see how rounded the shoulders are as opposed to the theoretically better sharp corners. How does this translate to a real-world listening experience? Well, square waves aren't everything, but they certainly are something; a rounded leading edge on a square wave indicates some loss of high frequencies. A leading edge that over-shoots the flat part of the square wave will "ring" to one extent or another, imparting distortion to the audio signal.

The general consensus is that Analysis Plus produces no-nonsense cables at prices more in line with the budgets of average audiophiles rather than the five-figure-per-component guys. The Copper Oval is priced at \$269 USD per meter pair -- a reach for budget high-enders but a potential money-saving price point for mid-budget high-enders. The Power Oval is \$267 per four-foot length, and the Oval 9 is \$347 per eight-foot pair, \$665 in biwire configuration.

Turn on the music

Madonna's recent *Music* [Maverick/WB 947598-2] seems divided into two ranges: one covering vocals and below, the other covering the upper midrange and treble electronica. The Analysis Plus interconnects and speaker cables delineate the two ranges well -- perhaps too well. The bass is overly prominent while the highs become excessively energetic. On an acoustic recording, the soundtrack to *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* [Mercury P270069], the Analysis Plus cables have a warm, full bottom, satisfying on upright bass, a prominent body sound from guitar and fiddle, a rich full mandolin tone, and properly chesty male and female vocals. Dobro has just the right combination of honky weight and plucky transients. The cables' top-end speed and tendency toward energy are rarely obvious on *O Brother*, unless there are hard sibilants. "Shh" sounds are not emphasized, but "tss," "khh" or "chh" sounds can be launched from the tweeter if an inappropriate microphone was used on the vocal, especially female vocals.

Steely Dan's *Two Against Nature* [Giant/WB 9247192-2] reveals a bit about the transparency of the Analysis Plus cables. They produce a warm sense of transparent intimacy that serves this recording well. The soundstage is large and enveloping, and the vocals are full and balanced without being too chesty or thin. The top-end speed of the Analysis Plus cables reveals some questionable production and/or microphone choices that result in occasional distractions in the highs. Problems are revealed as well. Bass was too loose and loud, and there was a distracting zippiness in the upper mids and treble. These characteristics made the bass and highs grab my attention, resulting the midrange seeming laid-back in comparison.

The recordings that were the most satisfying to listen to with Analysis Plus cables were those that had the best overall balance -- with strong bass that wasn't overly hyped, rich and detailed mids, and well-recorded highs that were fully detailed without any aggressive character. The *Live Recordings at Red Rose Music* sampler [Red Rose Music RRM01], even with its standard CD layer playing, showed its qualities with complete clarity. The bottom end produced great body tone and an inviting warmth. Vocals were rich and detailed, had no hint of roll-off on top and no emphasized sibilants. Highs were pristine and avoided artificial bite. Trumpet was appropriately brassy and clean-sounding, with the bite intact, but no piercing sharpness that is evident on some recordings. Piano had a strong percussive sense with a harmonically rich tone that was somewhat surprising at the Copper Oval's and Oval 9's price point.

The Power Oval

By now you are probably getting a good picture of the Analysis Plus sound that I experienced. The Power Oval was no exception. It was simply uncanny to have a power cord that sounded exactly like the interconnects and speaker cables:

energetic on top, prominent on the bottom, at its best with well-balanced recordings. This happened with the 14 different components with which I used the Power Oval: two amplifiers, three DVD players, two tube preamps, a surround processor, two A/V receivers, two power conditioners, a DAC, and two digital signal processors.



The Power Oval had stiff competition from the Audio Power Industries Power Link 313 (\$159), which was more balanced top to bottom but lacked a bit of top-end detail compared to more expensive Analysis Plus power cord. The Power Link seemed "slower" in the upper mids and treble, but it was more natural-sounding and less distracting than the Power Oval. JPS Labs' Analog AC and Digital AC power cords (\$350 each) produced nearly ideal balance top to bottom combined with detail and dynamics that were at least the equal of the Power Oval. The Analog AC and Digital AC power cords had none of the zing on top end that the Power Ovals would bring to the table when fed a recording with even the slightest edge to it. Both the Power Link 313 and the JPS Labs power cords produced bass that was better balanced and more detailed too.

Higher ground

The higher priced cables I tried in comparison lacked the character the Analysis Plus cables can have in the upper midrange and treble on some recordings. Nordost Quattro-Fil interconnect (\$1600 per meter pair) is a good example, having excellent top-end extension with no lack of detail or nuance. Magnan Vi interconnect (\$599 per four-foot) and Signature speaker cables (\$1000 per eight-foot pair) have a delicate yet harmonically rich sound through the mids and highs and retain satisfying levels of detail. Nirvana S-L interconnects (\$695 per meter pair) and speaker cables (\$1295 per eight-foot pair) are very dynamic and transparent, yet they don't call attention to the treble to the same degree. All of these more expensive cables have a better grip on the bass, offering a more linear presentation with greater detail and no emphasis.

Summing up

Where will Copper Oval, Oval 9 and Power Oval find a home? If your system's bottom end is thin, weak, over damped and in need of warming up, the Analysis Plus cables will undo those problems. If you're already worried that your bass is big, bloated, soft, or overly warm, Analysis Plus is probably not your cable. If your system is smooth or slightly laid-back in the range just above female vocal all the way to the top octave, the Analysis Plus cables will fit in nicely. If you're already fighting a top end that seems bright, harsh, aggressive or over emphasized, the Analysis Plus cables will just reveal the problem to an even greater extent. If you're looking for a cable that will fill in the upper bass and bring a reticent top end to life, Analysis Plus may be your cable brand.

Silver Oval speaker cables

I've been using a pair of Analysis Plus Silver Oval speaker cables (\$599 per eight-foot pair) for many of my loudspeaker reviews -- in probably more than a dozen system configurations. The most obvious difference with these speaker cables is the opening up of the top end. Some cables seemingly roll off the upper frequencies with my Blue Circle BC2 mono amps in use. The Silver Ovals don't. In fact, they allow my BC2 amps to open up and really sing. Highs are pristine and extended, and the bottom end is also very strong. The difference isn't as obvious as the upper frequencies, but in comparison with other cables, it is still noticeable. Resolution is top-notch. This can perhaps be attributed to the high-frequency performance -- a more open top end can result in a perception of greater detail, but whatever the case, the result is the same, and I tend to slide the Analysis Plus cables into my system whenever I am reviewing a high-resolution minimonitor in order to hear all it can do.

Another phenomenon I noticed was perceived greater volume -- nothing drastic, but there consistently seemed to be more sound there. Was I imagining it? I believed this to be a byproduct of the high- and low-frequency characteristics, but a recent discussion with Roger Hebert of Wyetech Labs changed some of my thinking.

Wyetech Labs makes, among other products, the outstanding Topaz and Onyx single-ended-triode tube amplifiers that we've reviewed here at *SoundStage!*. SET amps, as most know, are generally low powered and sensitive to speaker load. Hebert uses Analysis Plus Oval 9 speaker cables in his system, and it was when he said to me that he noticed up to a 2dB increase in SPL levels with his amps that my ears perked up.

Being the engineer he is, Hebert went into detail about inductance, resistance and interactions between this and that. But his final words were the most important. Hebert feels that there are some key technical traits inherent in the design of Analysis Plus cables that make them exceedingly good matches with SET amplifiers *and* can allow such amps to play a little louder.

As I've long known, it's not necessarily the price of the cable that determines how well it works in a particular system but the system itself. And I've found that these reasonably priced Analysis Plus cables allow certain systems, like my own, to be all they can be.

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But all of this assumes that the Analysis Plus cables will perform the same way in your system as they did in mine. This review has merely reaffirmed what many reviewers have said over the years: cable performance is often system dependent. What works well in one system may not work well in another.

Perhaps the greater issue is if the Analysis Plus hollow-oval conductors are more true to the signal fed them, as the company's measurements would contend. I can't answer this with any certainty, but I trust what I heard. And if you already own Analysis Plus cables and are enjoying how they sound in your system, you should trust what you're hearing too.

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Analysis Plus Copper Oval Interconnects, Oval 9 Speaker Cables and Power Oval Power Cords

Prices: Copper Oval, \$269 USD per meter pair; Oval 9, \$347 per eight-foot pair; Power Oval, \$267 per four-foot length.

Warranty: Lifetime.

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