



Quality time with your X

ClearwayX, from Chord, is a pretty damn fine budget speaker cable reckons Martin Pipe.

For several years, Chord Company's Clearway was the 'go-to' speaker cable for the audiophile on a budget. For £10 per metre, it performed better than some cables selling for several times the

price. You can't stop progress, though, and the original cable has just been displaced by the ClearwayX.

The new product is 50% more expensive, at £15 per metre. That's quite a leap, and so I pestered Chord for an explanation. "The price had to

increase for a number of reasons" I was told. "Clearway was selling for the same amount since it was launched in 2015, meaning that for five years Chord absorbed the effects of inflation on labour, materials and shipping – as well as a weakening pound."



With this budget and affordable new cable Chord has made improvements. The ClearwayX has a new and more expensive XLPE (cross-linked polyethylene) insulation, replacing the original's FEP (fluorinated ethylene propylene) that Chord used because it had the "same electrical characteristics" as the PTFE found in costlier cables. The two conductors, built from multiple strands of high-purity oxygen-free copper are arranged in a twisted-pair configuration; this, say Chord, will "reduce interference".

The 14 AWG conductors are "big enough to bring control and definition to both bookshelf and floorstanding speakers". They are covered by a soft PVC internal jacket, over which twin foil shields that reduce radio frequency interference pickup are contra-wound. The internal jacket will also, it is said, minimise any "mechanically-induced noise". Finally, there is a tough outer protective covering of 10.5mm overall diameter.

In all, Chord's construction is carefully-considered. If you buy ClearwayX cables professionally-terminated (standard lengths of 1.5, 2m, 3m and 5m are available) then you get substantial shrouds that cover the 90mm of so of wiring that splits from the cable's body and goes to the plugs. These shrouds look good – and the "ChordOhmic" 4mm banana

plugs (spades can be specified as an alternative) are of a high standard. They are silver-plated, and their colour-coded bodies are ribbed for ease of handling.

However, termination adds significantly to the cost. The 3m pair I tested would set you back £150 – comprising £100 for the cable (2x 3x 4mm), plus £50 for the plugs (or spades). However, Chord told us that you can buy "off the reel" if you're prepared to attach bare wire directly to the binding posts of your amp and speakers. This is worth considering – avoid stray strands, and tighten those terminals!

We were also told that Chord – and its dealers – would "always be able to help with custom lengths and configurations for customers". If you want cables of specified length – and professionally-terminated at either or both ends – Chord dealers are equipped with the special tools needed to do this properly.

I tried the 3m ClearwayX review samples with a variety of equipment – the Cambridge AXR100D receiver and Q Acoustics 1030 speakers featured in this issue, as well as vastly more expensive Cambridge gear (the Edge NQ streamer and W amp) driving Quadral Aurum Wotan VIII 'speakers.

I compared ClearwayX with 2-core mains flex, of the sort you can

buy at DIY stores. It is typically sold for wiring indoor-lighting to mains plugs and covered by a white jacket. I chose it, because it's cheap – just over 50p a metre – and I've actually witnessed some people use it in their budget hi-fi systems! So, do the audible benefits justify splashing out an extra £100 for 3m lengths of ClearwayX?

The improvements were 'night and day', especially with the higher-end Cambridge kit and 'speakers. Bass was more revealing and bestowed with tangible solidity, a sonic looseness of the cheaper wire disappearing altogether. Midrange clarity – strings and vocals in particular – was better, while previously-elusive treble details now burst out of the mix. The system also conveyed dynamic swings with greater ease, but the biggest advantage is that everything just sounds...more musical. Even with the cheaper system, many of these improvements could be heard – albeit to a lesser degree. If you're still using bell-wire, give your ears a treat and ride the ClearwayX to better listening.

CONCLUSION

Despite the higher price relative to its predecessor, the Chord ClearwayX is still something of a bargain – especially if you're prepared to use bare wire attached to binding posts. A fine budget cable that is sophisticated in construction and audibly excellent.

**CHORD
CLEARWAYX**
£ PER METRE
(£ FOR
TERMINATED 3M
PAIR TESTED)



OUTSTANDING - amongst
the best.

VERDICT

A technically sophisticated budget cable with fine sound.

FOR

- audible improvements across the spectrum
- musical involvement
- well thought-out design, impeccably-executed

AGAINST

- terminations add significantly to cost

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