

Screen test

Martin Pipe tests Chord Company's 'X' upgrade to its budget C-Screen speaker cable.

The latest speaker cable to get Chord Company's 'X' factor is the entry-level C-Screen. This is aimed not only at audiophiles on a budget, but also home-cinema enthusiasts with plenty of audio channels to worry about. Said 'X' refers to Chord's use of XLPE (Cross Linked PolyEthylene) insulation, which replaces the FEP (Fluorinated Ethylene Propylene) material used in the previous C-Screen version - at a retail per metre, a popular line for Chord Company. According to the Wiltshire firm, the choice of insulation has a "profound effect" on a speaker cable - get it wrong, and enjoyment of your music can be impaired by traces of colouration.

Of course, the signal-carrying conductors insulated by Chord Company's new wonder material are also important. Specified for the C-screenX are 16 AWG's worth of multi-stranded oxygen-free copper conductors, two bunches of which are arranged in a twisted-pair configuration. Over this XLPE-covered wiring is wrapped a twin-foil shield. Another of Chord's speaker-cable specialities, this design feature helps to keep external interference at bay. Doing so, it's claimed, helps to convey subtlety while aiding coherence and timing. Try finding that attention to detail in the cheap stuff masquerading as 'speaker wire' at DIY stores!

The cable is then enclosed in a

overall PVC jacket, which reduces 'mechanical noise' as well as spacing those all-important conductors correctly. Such construction is remarkably-complex for what is after all a budget cable, and it also has the practical advantage of flexibility. Unlike the conspicuous esoteric stuff that could be used to tow ships, C-screenX - which has a overall diameter of only 9mm - can be routed around corners without impairing performance. Note that its white jacket helps the 'installer-friendly' C-screenX to blend in with contemporary decor (white skirting boards, for example). Furthermore, Chord Company say that there's little audible deterioration over longer runs.

I reviewed the 'step-up' version



of this cable - the ClearwayX - a few issues ago. It's a truly excellent cable, but 'X' upgrades made it 50% more expensive than its immediate predecessor. So too is the C-screenX, which sells for £100 a metre. Our review pair was fitted with the same factory/

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dealer-terminated ChordOhmic 4mm banana plugs that graced our ClearwayX review samples. These alone sell for £100 - nearly three times as much as the actual cable used to make our 3m review pair! Dealers will sell you the desired lengths of C-screenX 'off the reel', and there's no obligation on your part to have them terminated. Audiophiles on a budget can thus instead feed bare wire into the binding posts of their amp and speakers - or opt for gold-plated 4mm Banana Plugs that Chord also makes available for £10 a set.

In performance terms, the review samples exhibited similar basic characteristics to the ClearwayXs I tested earlier with the same equipment (Cambridge CXN/AXR100D receiver/Q Acoustics 1030 speakers, Cambridge Edge NQ and W/

Quadral Aurum Wotan Vllls). Yes, that Chord pedigree is present and correct. With the lower-priced kit, there's little to tell the two apart, the C-screenX being betrayed by nothing more than a very slight smearing of complex treble detail - and that was when listening to well-recorded 24-bit material. It is a credit to the worthiness of the C-screenX that I had to turn to the vastly-more expensive system to better-discern the differences.

Although the same low-frequency tautness is evident, a tiny but nevertheless perceptible

amount of impact is lost on pounding bass drums and synths (not really an issue with the cable's touted home cinema application, as the more visceral end of the spectrum would be handled by an active subwoofer). By any standards, though, the C-screenX represents a massive improvement over the DIY-store stuff. In terms of the all-important midrange, the C-screenX never fails in its ability to communicate expressively; into the bargain, dynamics and imaging are a cut above what you'd expect from a cable at its price point.

CONCLUSION

Yes, as with other 'X' rated Chord updates the C-screenX is 50% more expensive than what came before - however, it's still only £100 per metre. I'm hoping that the low price (especially if you connect it directly, in 'bare wire' form, to binding-post terminals) will convince the cynical punter to give the C-screenX a try. It proves that speaker cables, carefully-designed with audio specifically in mind, do make a difference...and needn't break the bank.



**CHORD COMPANY
C-SCREENX
FOR CHORDOHMIC -
TERMINATED 3M PAIR,
AS TESTED**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst
the best.**

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

An excellent choice for budget-conscious users - and those who believe cabling is of no benefit!

FOR

- bargain-hunters can order without terminations
- demonstrably superior to 'bell-wire' type cables
- make the most of even budget systems

AGAINST

- Chord Ohmic plugs add significantly to the price
- 50% more expensive than its predecessor...but hey, it's only £100 m

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