

CABLE BECOMES COMPONENT

JPS LABS' TOP-OF-THE-LINE ALUMINATA CABLE ILLUMINATES THE MUSIC

BY ERNIE FISHER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE SKUBINSKI



Five AWG alumiloy conductors feed the signal in the Aluminata cable.

JPS LABS HAS been manufacturing cables since 1990. Located in Depew, a small community near Buffalo in upstate New York, president and chief designer Joe Skubinski is an enthusiastic audio devotee who began researching cable technology in the mid-eighties. He soon put his research to work, making cables in the affordable and mid-price ranges. Nowadays, Skubinski can claim over 20 years of real world experience in electrical and RF design engineering and complex system integration, making him a seasoned, experienced authority.

The first time *TIE* reviewed a JPS Labs product was back in 1999; it was the low priced Ultra Conductor model (reviewed in Vol. 11, No. 3). Since then *TIE* has reviewed other models but nothing approaching the quality of the ultra high-end cable under review here.

The Aluminata Series cables arrived in my studio about three months ago. Unwrapping a rather large package, I discovered that Joe had sent a pair of eight-foot speaker cables as well as a 23-foot pair and a three-foot pair of interconnects, a couple of AC cords and a digital

cable. The cables came packaged in slim, modern, stylish, aluminum carrying cases.

This evaluation covers them all, except the digital cable, which I will hand over to *TIE*'s HT expert David McCallum. I connected the speaker cables, the interconnect and the AV cords into a couple of system configurations and listened to each cable's sonic attributes, first separately, then altogether. I did this to help understand what to expect when only one or another cable is used in applications.

Appearance

TO CALL THESE cables beautiful would be an exaggeration to be sure. The cables are about two-inches thick with a woven black material covering the nitty gritty. Mine came terminated with banana plugs—and here is beauty—they are heavy duty locking WBT. The bananas are angled off with a tightening screw that spreads the contact area, making the job of connecting quick, efficient and trouble-free.

The interconnects are much smaller, only about one-inch thick, covered with the same black weave and terminated with excellent RCAs. The thickest and most cumbersome

FACTS

MODEL	Aluminata Series Cables
MANUFACTURER	JPS Labs
RATING	♪♪♪
PRICE (US)	\$8,499 (8 ft/pr speaker cables)
	\$2,999 (3 ft/pr interconnects)
	\$3,499 (6.5 ft power cord)
CONTACT	JPS Labs 716.714.5710 jpslabs.com

Authorized reprint of: The Inner Ear Volume 17, #3 2006/2007

85 Moorehouse Drive, Toronto, ON, Canada M1V 2E2. For subscriptions call Tel: (416) 297-7968



Aluminata speaker cable terminations include either WBT spades or banana plugs.

cables are the power cords. They are more flexible than the speaker cables but heavy, about two-inches thick but otherwise identical in appearance. Don't even attempt to hide these cables or make them rest flat on the floor; instead show them with pride for these are likely more expensive than most people's entire sound systems! However, you get what you pay for—read on.

The Sound

FIRST, I CONNECTED the Bryston 28B-SST monoblocks, reviewed in this issue, to evaluate the speaker cables, interconnects and AC cords. This followed a burn-in period of one week during which time I checked the cables' performance on a daily basis. When I no longer heard changes, I began listening to the completely wired system: Bryston amps, Simaudio P-8 and Wyetech Labs Opal preamps, and all the loudspeakers reviewed in this issue. The Aluminata cables served this system well, as they did not accentuate any segment of the frequency range. This pointed to a constant tonal equilibrium—one of the important elements in high-end audio. If you have experienced a lack of resolution in your audio system, rejoice, as these cables will perform admirably and delineate what (musical) definition is all about.

Further listening tests with the above listed components established the Aluminata as one of the few cables offering a very delightful tonal balance, without sounding dry or dull. Razor sharp resolution at bottom frequencies renders the deepest bass notes without hesitation, but—and here is the most desirable element—clearly allows harmonics above the fundamental notes. If the loudspeakers and the amplifier can reproduce 25Hz, the cable will handle the low frequency better than most I have auditioned in the past.

Inner detail—the sonic subtleties within complex program material—is only possible with high resolution electronics *and* cables. As most of the details are in the midrange and mid-high frequencies—the range from about 160Hz all the way to 5000Hz—perspicuity here is particularly important. The Aluminatas provide this important clarity and resolution and handle the entire frequency band without, however, rendering a note out of

proportion. I was particularly impressed with the cables' tonal equilibrium, the refined, composed flow of musical information and the absence of edginess throughout all the midrange frequencies.

One of my tests involves listening to familiar program material through a few power amplifiers to which I'm intimately acquainted. The Wyetech Labs Topaz tube job (reviewed in the last issue) is one of them and served as an auditioning component for both interconnects and speaker cables. The test illuminated the cables' ability to convey the sound of the amp and preamp as clearly as I've ever heard. Nothing was added and nothing was omitted, and the cable confirmed the amplifier's identity in the system. I found that the cables' reaction to the complete Simaudio set-up and the Bryston monoblock system was the same, thereby confirming my opinion that the Aluminata cable design embraces a very impartial sonic quality—a good thing for high-end components.

Imaging describes components' ability to set up a sound stage, and the Aluminata accomplishes this with dimensional legitimacy. I enjoyed all the loudspeakers connected to the systems and I admired the cables' ability to convey the size, shape and acoustic attributes of both the original recording space and the performers occupying that space.

I have a number of good quality AC cables and use them for amps, preamps and source components. To test the Aluminata AC cords, I unplugged the ones I use and inserted them. The Aluminatas made a tremendous difference—not by changing the sound, but by intensifying the characteristics of the equipment. I expected increased resolution and, though I did get a little of that, the most beneficial elements were improved tonality, a better view into the sound stage, better “blacks” or lower noise floor and significantly improved transparency. It's truly one of the best I have auditioned.

Synopsis & Commentary

EVERY SPEAKER CABLE, interconnect and AC cord has a unique sonic signature—don't let anyone tell you differently. While measurements for cables are now routine, we can only measure impedance, resistance, capacitance and inductance; there is no measurement for “personality”—the voice of a cable.

In today's high-end market, cables can no longer be regarded as an accessory; they are part of the system and should be considered components with which to achieve the desired results. Most prominent cable manufacturers adhere to well-established technology, sometimes focusing on one or two disparate elements, sometimes not. I have found that most high-end cable manufacturers deliver the goods and I'm often surprised that the sonic quality of these cables is quite comparable. Yes, there are trivial differences and the "voice" may be specific to a brand, but most of the sonic elements I'm looking for are discernible. However, things to consider when choosing cables for a system are personal preference, compatibility with components and rational

thinking. High-end cables, such as the ones reviewed here, provide less of the aforementioned "voice," making them compatible with a much larger group of electronics than the less expensive alternatives. I have yet to find what I'd consider the most desirable attribute—an indisputably neutral sounding cable. However, quite a few high-end cables have some degree of neutrality and it is for this reason that they work well with more system configurations than their lower priced cousins. The Aluminata Series of cables belongs to the high-end, hi-performance category, which they share with few other players. I feel that JPS has successfully produced a cable that is made for the equipment I like to listen to—that's high resolution audio with the appropriate respect for the music.

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TECHNOLOGY

JOE SKUBINSKI SAYS that he worked on this cable design for a couple of years, seeking the "right" materials and methods to achieve his goal—a high-end cable that handles all musical information without adding or subtracting from the original audio signal.

The Aluminata speaker cable boasts enormous 5 AWG/16.8mm-squared Alumiloy conductors with special tubular dielectrics to seal them from external interference while eliminating absorption of low-level detail. Covered by PAS™ (Particle Aluminum Shield), the cable provides perfect noise containment, absorption and mechanical vibration damping. I'm told PAS is the most extensive cable shield ever implemented. Yet with all its vibration damping, noise absorbing

mass, this unique JPS shield is not reactive to any power traveling through the wires wrapped beneath. The oversized conductors within the speaker and AC power cables can carry in excess of 50 amps or 6000 watts continuous and over 250 amps or 30,000 watts instantaneous current without audible power loss even with the largest of amplifiers. These cables boast ultra-high noise immunity, but allow the subtle nuances contained in the lowest milliwatts of power—inner detail—to pass through.

According to Joe Skubinski, the Aluminata interconnects offer the highest degree of noise and hum immunity. A quad layer of a newly-designed and specially annealed solid core Alumiloy conductor (the equivalent of two

12 AWG/3.31mm squared conductors) is employed, resulting in negligible resistance even in longer cables. Each conductor is individually insulated with expensive, medical grade Kapton. Rigid standards take thickness and purity into account and the cable assembly is enveloped by a smaller version of the PAS, designed to achieve noise absorption and ultra-low impedance.

The Aluminata AC power cable builds upon previous JPS designs. It begins with a big, but flexible, eight-gauge high-purity JPS alloy conductor wrapped in a Kapton jacket. JPS is the first A/V cable manufacturer in the world to utilize this high-tech, costly and uncommon aerospace insulation in its cable design. Combined with the conductors, it is said to totally eliminate

spectral smearing of highs, open up midrange for improved clarity and define low frequency response. The conductors are assembled to JPS' trademarked Optimized Field Matrix (OFM) design parameters, which take many elements into consideration: conductor size, dielectric thickness, constant potential noise frequencies and amplitude, capacitance, inductance and many other factors. JPS has also added a "world's first" feature for AC cords called EOL (End Of Line) technology, a unique proprietary element which dissipates reflections within the cord itself. This is said to allow bass to sound tight and detailed, while "opening up" mids and highs. The Aluminata power cable is finished with a premium Wattgate Gold AC plug and gold IEC connectors.