

Love island

Atlas has delivered a new mid-range baby. Martin Pipe gets connected by the Ailsa.

The substantial looking Ailsa coaxial RCA/phono interconnect (£350 for a 1m stereo pair) is the first product of a mid-market range from Scottish cable specialist Atlas. Named after Ailsa Craig, an uninhabited 240-acre island in the Firth of Clyde that can be seen from the vantage point of Atlas' Kilmarnock factory, the new cable sits precisely midway between the entry-level element and the esoteric Asimi Luxe.

You get some idea of where Atlas is coming from through its use of the word "achromatic" - literally, free of colouration). To fulfil this, Atlas uses some of the same techniques of more expensive interconnects. Solder is avoided, Atlas instead cold-welding (precision-crimping) conductors - with calibrated tools - to connectors. Also conspicuous by its absence is silver-plating, which Kelly believes is responsible for an 'impressive' presentation that fatigues after a while. For the signal carrying core conductor of the Ailsa's proprietary 8mm-diameter coaxial cable, Atlas has specified grain-free OCC (Ohno Continuous Cast) copper; this has been claimed by some listeners to offer audible benefits, in terms of transient delivery and resolution.

The outer shielding makes use of high-purity OFC copper wire and copper/Mylar foil. In between the two concentric conductors is the dielectric layer that is carefully built-up by applying layers of microporous PTFE tape, using proprietary Atlas techniques. By wrapping the tape in a particular way, the air thus trapped forms part of the dielectric.

At either end of the Ailsa you'll another 'Atlas special' - the

Achromatic phono plug, described as a "low-mass, non-magnetic, cold-weld connector". As well as an insert containing the central signal-carrying pin, it consists of two 'half-shield' barrel plates that are secured to the plug's plastic outer housing with grub screws. The plugs mated comfortably with all of the phono sockets I tried. Contact was evidently good, yet the plugs could be removed without a tug of war.

Atlas recommends that its cables are treated to a 72 hour burn-in period at room-temperature before use, and said advice was followed. To achieve this, a Cambridge Audio Edge NQ Network streamer was attached to an Arcam A49 integrated amp via the Ailsas; an Internet radio station provided a constant and effort-free source of audio! Interstation pink noise, from an FM tuner, is probably even better. Speakers were Quadral Aurum Wotan Vllls.

The burn-in complete, critical music listening could begin. Even older recordings fared well with the Ailsas in circuit; greater definition was bestowed on the tambourine that is

so prominent in Iggy Pop's *The Passenger*. I also found that Iggy's characteristic vocal contribution was teased a little further out of the mix.

A greater sense of atmosphere and percussive 'snap' was perceptible when listening Joy Division's *'She Lost Control'*. I could also make out more space in large-scale orchestral works; furthermore, the

percussive crashes of Liszt's *Faust Suite* (Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra/Francesco D'Avalos) were accommodated dynamically, while at the same time managing to convince in terms of the subtleties.

Analogue sources fared well too. I hooked up my Systemdek IIXE900 belt-drive turntable (fitted with Alphason Opal arm and Denon DL304 MC cart) to the Arcam; here, the Ailsas connected the output of my phono stage (a Pro-Ject Phono Box S2 Ultra) to a spare line input. The *Are You Sphongled?* double album suggested a hint more bass depth and control. Yet for all this, no tonal imbalances are evident; the "achromatic" claims that Atlas makes for the Ailsa are, to my ears, justified. What you're actually hearing is more of your music being conveyed from source to amp.

CONCLUSION

The intelligently-designed Atlas Ailsa phono interconnects may add nothing to your music, in terms of tonal or imaging shifts, but they do help to bring out the finer details. Well worth a trial.

ALSO AVAILABLE:

0.5m	- £250
0.75m	- £300
1.5m	- £450
2m	- £550
3m	- £750

ATLAS AILSA £350 (1M PAIR, AS TESTED)



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

A mid-range cable that can take you just that little bit closer to the music.

FOR

- "nowt added, and nowt taken away"
- design is practical
- well-constructed

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

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