

ACCESSORIES

They might be seen as the supporting cast, but these extras can make or break your system's performance

New look, same great ability to be balanced, neutral and engaging



BEST SPEAKER CABLE

CHORD CLEARWAY £10/m



Chord's Clearway wins our Accessory Product of the Year title for the second year running, and deservedly so. Every system, whether stereo or home cinema, needs speaker cables to work. And, while not cheap, this is a top quality cable that will work well with most of the systems in this magazine and is good enough to let them shine.

The big change for this year is a new colour - the shiny silver finish of last year's Clearway giving way to a less showy white. The rest of the cable stays the same and that's no bad thing.

Let's twist again

The heart of this Chord is a twisted pair of high-purity multi-strand copper conductors. They're twisted to reduce the effect of external electrical interference and insulated with FEP, a kind of polymer.

It doesn't stop there, though. A layer of soft PVC, chosen for its flexibility, is wrapped around the conductor core to give it protection, then covered by two layers of foil for electrical shielding.

Nodding off yet? If all that technical stuff was as interesting as watching grass grow, all you need to know is that this Chord cable works brilliantly and your system will sound better with it plumbed in than with any similarly priced alternative.

Things sound nicely balanced with the Chord in our reference set-up. The system's tonality is neutral without sounding overly clinical in any way. We're engrossed by the beauty of Debussy's *Clair De Lune*, and struck by the recording's subtle yet forceful dynamics. We love the way the set-up handles the nuances of timing, and the way the music just flows without the mechanics of hi-fi intruding on our thoughts.

This year we tried a whole range of rivals from the likes of QED, Kimber and Ecosse among others. The most impressive of these, in performance per pound terms, was the QED XT40, but that cable lacks the cohesion and dynamic thrust that makes the Chord so likeable. That's why we rate the Chord - it's a well-balanced proposition. The price, while not budget, is still sensible, and wherever we use it, the system just works well. If you're looking for some quality speaker cable, start here.