

Vertere Redline interconnect

by Alan Sircom

Interconnect cables come and go, but with Redline Vertere is definitely on to something. In fact, this is more a review of Redline as a complete cable family (I still can't quite bring myself to say 'loom', as that was the rusty, oily spider of wires that fell out of my Mini years ago), but expressed through the interconnect, as this is perhaps the prime focus of the system.

With all the (understandable) noise about Vertere's turntables of late, it's worth remembering that the first products from Vertere (while Touraj Moghaddam was quietly designing the Reference tonearm in the background) were interconnect cables. These ultimately became the Pulse-HB (Hand-Built) range. This grew into the Pulse-R and D-Fi ranges. The problem here is there is now a significant price difference between the entry-level D-Fi and the Pulse-R, making the jump from one to another a bit too 'sharp intake of breath' for most people (there is a similar jump between Pulse-R and Pulse-HB, but the logic is that if you are already spending Pulse-R money, you'll probably be able to find the 'folding' for the Pulse-HB, even if you do so in stages). Redline meets in the middle, taking many of the lessons learned in making Pulse-R, but in a cable system that is an attainable upgrade for existing D-Fi users, and regular music lovers without steroid-fuelled wallets.

This isn't just a 'tweener' cable, however; it's a complete system in its own right. The fact it draws from existing products doesn't make it any less relevant. But occupying the point between entry-level and benchmark products doesn't make for an easy life for Redline. In a way, this grade of cable is the 'proof of concept' product line, as it needs to reflect much of what the top models offer while not rendering them unsaleable in the process. It also doesn't get the 'soft landing' of the entry-level products. While generally a little too expensive to fall into the hands of the cable cynics, it's also affordable enough to be the victim of a spot of negative marketing by rivals (although fortunately, this doesn't seem to be part of the way most cable brands operate; they are – generally – more likely to consider their rivals as 'fellow travellers' than go all *Game of Thrones* on them). Moreover, this level of cable often ends up in more unpredictable system matches compared to a high-end or low-cost cable; Redline might conceivably be mixing with some very high falutin audio gear, or wired up between a couple of poor quality devices. It's a tough job.





▶ Redline is a complete range of cables, comprising interconnects of every possible combination (including a lot of Naim-chummy locking DIN-plugs), turntable-specific cables (naturally), loudspeaker cables, power cords/ mains cables and USB cables. This is very much a 'now' range in that what's missing from the list are S/PDIF cables or AES/EBU wires. What's also missing from the list is an Ethernet cable. This last is interesting because Vertere's only Ethernet cable is in the large Hand-Built family, alongside AES/EBU., while Pulse-R just features analogue interconnects and speaker cables... there's not even power cords in that line.

As suggested earlier, Redline is derived from Vertere's Pulse-R cable technology and follows the same basic design principles. In all cases, Vertere designs cables that claims to "preserve the essence of the audio signal", and while that's a goal that all audio companies seek to achieve, there are many different paths up that particular mountain and in Vertere's case it's preserving timing information first and foremost, with detail and spatial information coming in for a photo finish for second place. Regardless, common to all the Pulse-derived cables in Vertere's line, Redline interconnect cable is an inherently 'balanced' design and is double shielded utilising an outer tin plated copper braid and an inner fully wrapped conductive tape. While we are focusing on the analogue interconnects here, Redline features seven independent conductors per channel (ten in the speaker cable) facilitating different configurations to ensure optimum musical performance regardless of that cable's ultimate destiny and role in life. All Redline cable connectors made for Vertere and the contacts are specially gold plated to three times standard gold-plating thickness. ▶

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► So, the reason we’re staying with the interconnect cable is that uniformity of design makes the cables very uniform in sonic approach too. Redline isn’t one of those cable systems that features one star product, with the rest riding on its coat-tails, but if we are singling individual cables out for their strengths and weaknesses, the interconnect is perhaps the strongest and most indicative of the group, and the power cord the least ‘telling’ in absolute terms. As a family, though, they work together and sing together better than the Von Trapps.

I mentioned earlier that Redline is supplied with locking DIN’s for Naim users. That should be written large, because this cable ticks all those Naim boxes of creating a dynamic and clear sound that has a great sense of rhythmic integrity and precision of timing is preserved come what may. It’s not heavy-handed in its rhythmic properties, but if an amplifier is remotely capable of extracting a beat from a recording, the Redline range will do it justice. In the process of reviewing the interconnects (the whole set, in fact), I used this with the perfectly serviceable Mark Levinson 5805; an amplifier that is outstanding in refinement and detail terms, but can be a touch reticent in the rhythm department. With Redline and ‘War Memorial’ from Mark Lanegan and Duke Garwood’s *Black Pudding* [Heavenly], it really got behind the emotive, flowing sound. It’s not an easy listen – if anything, the Redline’s timing properties focus your attention on the lyrics and the pain that lies behind them – but it’s one heck of a rewarding one. I played this before without the Vertere Redline cables in place and it was good... but some of the magic was lost.

If you want to use cables as tone controls, Redline is not for you. This is a fundamentally accurate cable, leaving some of the better known rhythm kings sounding a bit warm and soft, and some of the detail queens sounding edgy and forward. So, alongside its rhythmic honesty is a sonic integrity and accuracy of tone. Staying with *Black Pudding* (the title track this time), that honesty makes an album that really isn’t that much of a test recording (good though it clearly is) sound like something that would be on every audiophile playlist.

Above all, there’s a sense of poise to the sound here, both in terms of its balancing act between all the important aspects of good sound, but more importantly is that sense of order it seems to impose on the electronics it sits between. This is a cable with a price ceiling, as a result; use it in the context of the highest of high-end products and its benefits will not be so forthcoming; that sense of order isn’t so demanded and isn’t so obvious as a result. On the other hand, place it in context (at least in the context of where a £600 interconnect should go) and the Redline brings order to the chaos. That being said, don’t mistake ‘order’ for something bland or uninspiring; the sound it produces is dynamically red(line) in tooth and claw, especially when you play something a little meaty [‘Enter Sandman’ from *Metallica* on Elektra]

I think one of the most telling parts of Redline (something it shares with the big turntables and exists in microcosm even in the D-Fi cables) is its bandwidth. You get the feeling all the music, all the information is being passed through an inherently transparent conduit here. Soundstage information, clarity, vocal articulation... all unimpeded by the connection between two devices. This can come as a bit of a surprise, as that isn’t something you might expect to hear from a cable, and yet it underlines all the Vertere cables do. And within the Redline range, the interconnect does it better.

Vertere’s Redline range is excellent. While it’s a cliché to say “it gets out of the way of the music” there is such a feeling of music unimpeded by the electronics when using Redline, it’s hard not to be tempted by that over-used phrase. While I don’t want to single out particular system combinations, I can imagine many Naim Audio users trying this – sceptically at first, but its siren song and great sense of rhythm will win them over. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Analogue interconnect with RCA phono connectors

Length: 1m pair

Conductor: high purity copper with silver plating

Dielectric: FEP, PVC

Shielding: Main braid, inner wrap

Size: 4.8mm diameter per conductor

Price: £670/m pair

Manufacturer details: Vertere Acoustics

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