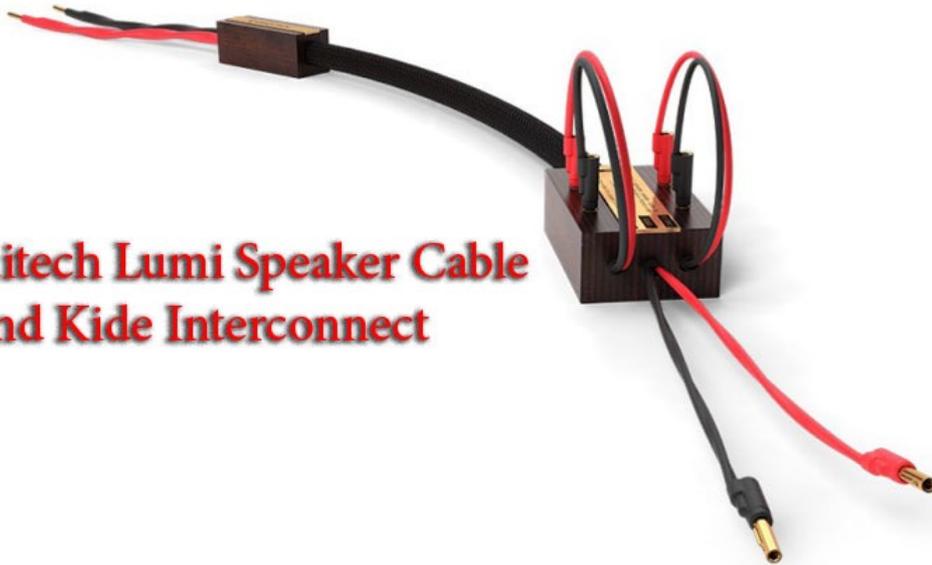


Stereo Times

The Complete Audiophile Magazine



**Graditech Lumi Speaker Cable
and Kide Interconnect**



Nicely Finished!



The high-end audio cable market has got to be the single toughest market to break into and be successful. I mean, there's only so much you can do to copper or silver wire to make your product

stand out from the rest. Some companies have added magnets to their cables while others have used fluids to insulate their cables, and more still have used cryogenic treatment on their cables. But Val Kratzman, the U.S. distributor for Penaudio, an excellent loudspeaker builder out of Finland, introduced me to a Finnish cable company that actually offers something that while it may not be quite as exotic as some other cable designs I believe not only makes them stand out from the crowd but may actually put them in the position of offering one of the best values in high-end audio. The name of the company is Graditech and the cables are the "Lumi Series" loudspeaker cables and "Kide" Series interconnects.

Pasi Lankinen, the founder of Graditech has relied on his background in designing and building electronics and loudspeakers, to learn the best methods for dealing with the shortcomings inherent in most audio components. Remember: There may be no such thing as a perfect audio component, but what is important is how well you build upon the component's strengths and diminish its weaknesses. This takes ingenuity and a highly trained ear; two things that I believe had to play a great part in the design of the Graditech cables.

As with all cables, regardless of price or pedigree, there is bound to be something that they just don't quite get right. If a cable sounds highly detailed and resolved it may also be called bright and analytical. If a cable retrieves a lot of deep bass information then it may be called muddy or boomy. Most theorize that this comes from the use of different types of wires (silver, copper, solid core, stranded, etc.), since all wires have varying sonic characteristics. So how then can you build up the strengths of these different wire types and minimize their weaknesses? Pasi Lankinen seems to have an answer.

Great Idea!

Every once in a while I come across an audio device whose design is so sensible that it makes you say: "Wow! Why didn't I think of that?" That was the reaction I had to the cables that Val sent me for this review, Graditech's Lumi 3 speaker cables. Try and imagine listening to your system with a pair of speaker cables using silver wires. You may find the sound to be detailed, airy, and highly resolved. But at higher volume levels you may also start to feel as though the sound is a bit on the bright or harsh side. Now imagine having the same configurations but now being able to minimize the brightness by changing the wire connected at the loudspeaker to either a solid copper wire or a stranded copper wire. *Voila!* Without making any major changes to your system you have just changed the character of the sound to make it more palpable to your musical taste.

Now this may be an oversimplification of what the Lumi cables are capable of but after spending the past few months with them, it's not far off.

The Lumi Cables

Starting from the amplifier end are the Lumi 3's positive and negative leads composed of three separate conductors: silver-copper, stranded copper and solid copper. The leads are terminated with hospital grade gold-plated banana plugs. The leads go into a wooden housing on one end, and out the other, come a now separated and isolated three sets of cables which are now wrapped in one attractive



nylon mesh jacket. The cables then go into the Lumi Cable Park™ which houses the three sets of wires. Out of the speaker end of the Cable Park™ come the three separated leads. On top of the Cable Park™ are four spots (two "+" and two "-") where whichever of the leads that are not being used can be "parked" to take them out of the signal path. Bear in mind also, that your options are not just limited to using one of the three cables at a time. The positive and negative leads do not have to be the same. In other words you can use the stranded cables on the positive terminals and the solid and or silver cables on the negative terminal. And just as with the amplifier end, the wires are connected to the speakers via hospital grade gold-plated banana plugs. These plugs, by the way, are excellent and give a real snug and confident fit.

The Lumi 2 speaker cables (which I did not have on hand), are like the Lumi 3 in that they give you some wire connectivity options but in this case the options are for either single-threaded copper and stranded copper, and both with ALC™ (Adjustable Loudspeaker Cable). While the Lumi 2 does not have all of the potential configurations of the Lumi 3, it is designed to maintain the sonic signature and integrity of the Lumi 3.

The Lumi 1 cables which obviously are Graditech's entry-level speaker cable. The Lumi 1's copper wires are twisted using a geometry that allows it to achieve the best sonic results although without the connectivity options of its bigger siblings.

The Kide Interconnect Cables

According to Graditech's website, the word "Kide" is a Finnish word that means a perfectly formed crystal whose beauty is capable of mesmerizing you. I suppose they feel that this is the same effect that listening to music from a system that uses the Kide cables will have. There are two types of Kide cables, the Kide 3 and the Kide 1. The Kide 3

cables are made of six strands (3 single twisted pair) of silver-plated copper conductors, wrapped in a PTFE Teflon dielectric and covered with a FEP outer jacket. The cables come with either Neutrik RCA or XLR connectors. The Kide 1 cables use 2 strands (a single twisted pair) of silver-plated copper conductors and like the Kide 3 also uses a Teflon dielectric and FEP outer jacket.

The Review System Is Setup and the Listening Begins

The system that I used to evaluate the Graditech cables featured a digital front end consisting of the Oppo DV980-H Universal Disc Player (as transport) feeding the Vitus Audio RD-100 DAC/Linestage. Amplification came from the Bel Canto Ref1000M monoblocks and the loudspeakers were the (sadly, now defunct) Black Moon Audio Fidelity Ones, a full-range floorstander.

I used the Soundstring Cable Technologies 75 Ohm Coaxial digital cable to connect the Oppo to the Vitus DAC. The Kide 3 balanced (XLR) interconnect connected the Vitus' linestage output to the Bel Canto amps and the Lumi 3 cables connected the amps to Black Moon Audio speakers which conveniently has two sets of terminals for bi-wiring.

Dave's Associated Equipment:

Analog Front End

George Warren Precision Sound Turntable

Moth Arm2 Incognito wired tone arm

Benz Micro Ace Cartridge

Transfiguration Phoenix

Digital Front End

Vitus Audio RD-101 DAC/Linestage

OPPO Digital DV-980H Universal Disc Player

Apple TV

Amplification

Bel Canto Ref 1000 Mono Amps

Bel Canto M300 Mono Amps

PassLabs XVR-1 ElectronicCrossover

PassLabs XP-15 Phono Stage

Loudspeakers

Escalante Design Fremont

Black Moon Audio Fidelity One Loudspeaker

Magnepan MG20 Loudspeaker

Cabling

Entreq Audio Konstantin Cables

Entreq Audio Apollo Cables

Stealth Audio Cables

Graditech Cables

Accessories

Adona Corporation Zero GXT Equipment Stand

Acoustic Revive RTP-2 Ultimate Power Supply Box

Isoclean 60A3 II Power Conditioner

EntreqVibbeaters

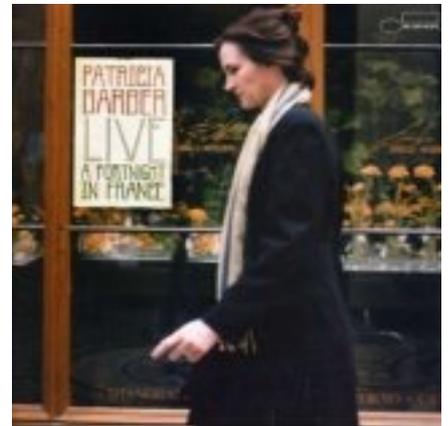
Entreq AC Wraps

In order to establish a reference point, I spent a few days listening to this system with my reference Entreq Audio Apollo balanced interconnect and speaker cables before replacing them with the Graditech cables. The Entreq cables are very neutral, so when I inserted the Graditech cables I expected to hear an immediately noticeable difference. I began my serious listening using the silver-copper wires from the Lumi 3 into the tweeter and midrange drivers of the Black Moon Audio speakers and the Stranded copper wires into the woofer. I was satisfied with the tonal balance of the tweeter but wanted to get a little more bass extension, so I replaced the stranded copper wires with the solid-copper wires and I got the result I wanted.

The first disc I played was bassist Marcus Miller's, *A Night In Monte Carlo* [Concord]. This live performance was recorded during the 2008 Monte Carlo Jazz Festival. He performed with trumpeter Roy Hargrove, guitarist Raoul Midon, and the Philharmonic orchestra of Monte Carlo. Track 2 is a cover of Miles Davis' "So What." It opens with a string section lead-in that immediately gives you a sense of the size and scale of the soundstage, not to mention the venue. The strings are accurately densely layered yet still maintain their musical nature. I noticed the same thing when listening to track 4, "I Loves You Porgy." The orchestra is rendered nicely, with good delineation of instruments and excellent front to back spacing.

The solid copper wires really seemed to work very well with the woofers, but where I really got to take full advantage of the Lumi 3's capabilities was easily switching the wires on the high-frequency drivers. Admittedly, I have a preference for silver cables on tweeters; I just think they're rendering of music is more accurately spacious, open and detailed sounding. Yes, they're a bit brighter too but so is much of live music. But for certain types of music, particularly rock where there tends to be an abundance of

cymbal crashes and screeching guitars, this can be a bit much. Such was the case when I began listening to George Clinton and the P-Funk All Stars' *Dope Dogs* [Hot Hands Records]. Despite being heavily linked to funk, R&B, and soul music, Clinton has always had a distinct slant in his music towards rock and in his latter career it was a fusion of rock and hip-hop. That's exactly what *Dope Dogs* is. The first track, "Dog Star" is a hard driving, pulse-pounding tune that is gushing with spectacular drum work, deep bass and roaring guitar solos. And if you don't like music that is loud, bright, and aggressive, keep silver speaker wires well away from your speakers. Or in the case of the Lumi 3 cables simply disconnect the silver-copper wires and connect either the stranded or solid copper wires instead. The difference is immediate. The high frequencies lose a bit of their edge and bite without sacrificing any musicality. The silver-copper is still a bit more airy to me but I can see where many folks would prefer the sound of one of the other wires.



Getting to what I feel is the most important aspect of a cable's performance: the way it allows the system to portray live music, particularly vocalists, I started listening to *Patricia Barber Live: A Fortnight In France* [Blue Note]. Track 5, "Pieces," is a great example of how these cables can be tailored to a system. The silver-copper wires seemed to match Barber's wispy, full-throated voice perfectly while the solid copper wires worked famously with the low-end, especially Eric Montzka's drum work. The same can be said for track 9, "Whiteworld" which features Michael Arnpol on bass. Not only is the music rendered well but you get a real sense of the atmosphere inside the venue.

Conclusion

Together the Graditech cables worked exceptionally well in my system and individually they also acquitted themselves nicely. But the cable that is the real story here is the Lumi 3 speaker cable. The flexibility of the ALC™ design is a game changer. Their ease of use and ability to be all cables to all audiophiles is what sets them apart. Also, as we get ready to go to press with this review, I've just learned that Graditech will soon have a digital cable available as well so stay tuned. I'm not sure how available these cables are in the US just yet; you'll have to talk to Val Kratzman about that. But they will be well worth seeking out and could possibly be the last speaker cable you'll ever buy. Highly recommended.

Dave Thomas



Specifications:

Lumi 3 Speaker Cables

Three twisted pair of three different conductors – single-threaded copper, stranded copper, and silver-plated stranded copper – selected to generate the best sound and parity between the amplifier and speakers.

ALC™ technology and CablePark™: two conductors at amplifier and six at speakers

Dielectrics: Air, THEIC-modified varnish, PVC and Teflon

Kide 3 Interconnect Cables

6 strands / 3 single twisted pair of silver plated copper conductors

PTFE Teflon dielectric

FEP Outer jacket

Neutrik RCA or XLR

Pricing:

Lumi 3 Speaker Cables

2 meter \$4660

2.5 meter \$5275

3 meter \$5890

Kide 3 Interconnects (RCA or XLR)

1 meter \$1500

1.5 meter \$1725

2 meter \$1950

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the **Stereo Times**

Most Wanted Components 2013

★ AWARD ★