



Achievum Cable Engineering Live Mk 1 Speaker cables & Interconnect

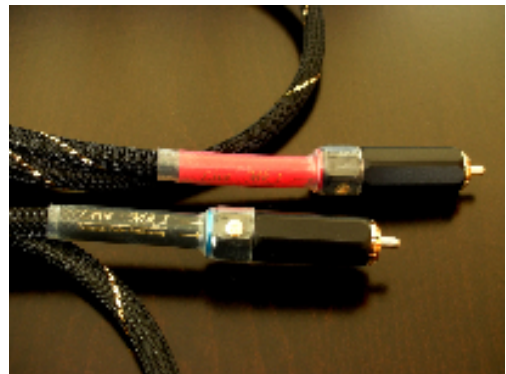
By Mordekhay Zehavi • November, 2009 (<http://www.hometheater.co.il/>)

Introduction:

So again we touch what seems to be one of the most sensitive issues to audiophiles – interconnects and speaker Cables.

A few weeks ago I was privileged to accept two pairs of cables to be reviewed; a speaker cable and RCA interconnects, both from the series Live Mk 1, which is currently the only series of a small company located in Belgium called Achievum Cable Engineering.

I was determined at first, to perform a concise review constructed of a few short sentences, characterizing the nature of the sound, convenience of use and perhaps appearance as well, along with the retail price.



That said, to state simple facts without raising tantrums upon me from the site readers, as most articles about audio cables usually do. However, the test results led me to a completely different place.

Getting down to business:

The Achievum name seems to represent the level of achievement the company is aiming for.

While reading about the company, I came across the slogan: "Closer to live experience" which may be a bit excessive and garish, especially when it comes from a relatively new company. A statement that I did like is the manufacturer's 30 days return policy, if the product does not meet customer's expectations. This goes to show willingness to stand behind the slogans or any technical description, which interested me; are the cables really that good?

Some technical data:

According to Achievum, the cable design process was carried out in cooperation between engineer's experts in

signal integrity and audio professionals, for the result of an accurate signal transfer, but without losing the musical character which the cables aimed at.

According to Achievum, the cables are terminated by hand, with attention to detail and with no compromises.

By Engineering point of view, both cables: RCA and speaker cables were designed to convey high conductivity, low inductance and RFI radiation resistance.

The speaker cables are made of 24 individually isolated 20 AWG conductors in special geometry in order to obtain reference electrical characteristics and signal performance, over the whole audible frequency spectra. While in the RCA cables, a special emphasis was made to protect against the most common hi-fi related interference, such as transformer, power cord induced hum etc.

Although it is in my nature to dig down into the technical details, I do not want to expand more on the technology. For experience sake alone, the details may be interesting only after the proof of performance, which after you can proudly explain how the company managed to reach such good performance, providing that the victims of your lecture will be polite enough to listen without making up creative excuses to escape before they fall asleep from the boring details.

Prices:

According to the manufacturer's site, the speaker cables are priced:

2 * 2 meter => 449 Euro

2 * 2,5 meter => 499 Euro

2 * 3 meter => 549 Euro

The RCA cables are priced:

2 * 0,65 meter => 310 Euro

2 * 1 meter => 365 Euro

In both cases, each additional meter will set you back another 40Euro.

Although the cables are not cheap, they are definitely not expensive, especially in the High End market which they are aiming for, and I must admit that I already tried matching substantially more expensive cables with my system.

To my opinion, quality or quality setting of an audio cable is measured by three categories, by importance respectively: (before considering the price of course).

- 1. Performance – musicality, details and accuracy.**

This is the most important category, and here I will try to specify how the cable matches itself to my system, in another system of a different nature, and how it performs in comparison to my current cables. In order to get some comparative points.

- 2. Ease of use**

I do not want to use a cable that requires strength of a wrestler with the flexibility of a yoga master while connecting or disconnecting the cables. Caused by excessive stiffness, unreasonable thickness or any other factors that makes any assembly or removal of a cable into a nightmare, and yea... I already encountered such.

- 3. Appearance**

this is the least important point to my opinion, but still; I would not like to buy a cable at that price tag, that looks like a sloughing snake, especially in the middle of my living room.

With accordance to these three characteristics I examined the cables.

So, after a long introduction, let's start from the least important issues:



Looks and ease of use:

Here, a picture may be worth a thousand words. I think that the cables are designed simply and beautifully, both are luxurious and have an impressive looks.



Neither one is too thick, nor made in a strange geometry, connecting or disconnecting of both is an easy job.

One point though is that the thin connector of the speaker cable were too small to allow firm contact with the female connectors of the amplifier and speaker, which forced me to expand them (a simple operation that some may decline that the connectors are designed for), after that connectivity was firm and satisfying.

As for the RCA cables, those are some of the more comfortable ones that I used in my system, and beyond the flexibility and reasonable thickness, they are equipped with comfortable locking connectors.

Bottom line here; for the looks and for ease of use, both gets a very good score by me.

But what about the main issue here?!

Sound performance:

First, a few words about the test setup.



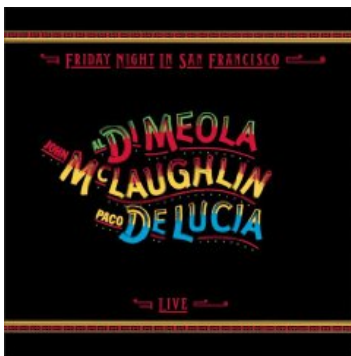
- CD: Meridian 508.24
- Preamp: Theta CB in analog direct mode
- Power amp: Gamut D200 Mark III
- Speakers: Ultimus Audio prototype I

The system in the current setup is very detailed but suffers slightly from a cold nature of sound.

The RCA cable replaced an AUDIOQUEST model RUBI, connected between the CD to the preamp, and the speaker cables replaced XLO's model Reference. Both cables residing with me quite a while and I really like both.

After about 200 hours of break in according to the manufacturer's recommendation, and against superstitions, I finally got to the test:

The first track I played with the cables was of the three guitars of Al Dimeola, John McLaughlin and Paco De Lucia in: *Friday night in San Francisco*.



The immediate response while playing the first section: Mediterranean Sundance Rio Ancho, which is long as it is beautiful to me, was a wow - these cables are really good with guitars!

The impression was that the sound was refined and a bit more pleasing to the ear, which made the sound more natural compared to what I was accustomed to, while at the sections where the guitars really attack, I got exactly the same force that I am used for.

In addition, the stage with the crowd in the background sounds clearer and felt more alive, so up to here the result was nothing less than impressive.

At that point, I wanted to mention that in comparison to other cables that I tested with my system, the Achievum Live Mk 1 have proved a neutral character of sound. Despite the fact that I would prefer warmer sound for my system (a combination of the system electronics with the speakers), the final result was a very detailed and clear sound.

Well, then maybe the Live Mk 1 were designed to play well especially in live performances?! So the next question I was asking was; how will they perform in other styles of music?

Listening to Norah Jones - Come Away with Me. This is one of the albums that serves me best to examine female vocal. In Norah Jones records, Norah is located significantly closer comparing to the other instruments, and with the Live Mk 1 the ratio of difference in the positions between Norah and the instruments got emphasized. Here as well the result was the same as what I already heard in the first section: a more natural, slightly warm sound which tends to result in a more realistic sound in comparison to my cables. A significant improvement was in details, while background noise as I used to hear, became more distinct instruments, which led to a final result of a much bigger and clearer stage.

From here on, each album that I played, from Israeli like Natasha's friends in RADIO BLA BLA, through jazz such as Joe Henderson - Big Band, classic as CARMEN FANTASIE performed by Anne Sophie Mutter, and more - the result was all the same, it seems like these cables are all Rounder performers that does the same with each style I threw at them.

But there is one track that I feel obliged to share the way that Live Mk 1 impressed me in particular. I am relating to a very quiet song and one of the most beautiful in my opinion – "Sometimes it Snows in April", performed by one of the usually very loud singers - Prince, in the album Prince and the revolution / parade. Beyond the lyrics, Prince really impresses with his vocal which accompanied only by piano, guitar and background sound.

As far as I know and love the song, the ability of the Live Mk 1 to make Prince sound even more realistic, the absolute magnitude of the guitar with all the background sounds in the studio. All together, just reminded me of the first impression that I felt when I heard the song for the first time. For me, at that point, I just felt that beyond the details or any analytical evaluation of the sound; the transparency here went directly to emotion. And that just says it all.

Does the Live Mk 1 sounds like that only in my system?



That question interested me after the impression that I got in my system, so I decided to try the RCA cable in a completely different system setup. This consists of a warmer system of an AudioNote's D to A (tube driven), hybrid amplifier of Unison Research and Opera speakers. As I mentioned, the system character is warm sound while at the time I arrived, my friend was trying to make up his mind between the VDH cable - Hybrid Thunderline which results with more detail but less pleasant sound, and Analysis Plus - Oval one which produced a more pleasant sound, but at the expense of detail.

Upon connecting the Live Mk 1 RCA, the result was similar to the one experienced with my system; again we got a pleasant sound that seems more appropriate to the setup which allowed the instruments to sound more natural with impressive details. It is important to point out that the Live Mk 1 RCA is in a slightly different price range than the two compared to it, yet the result was still very impressive – Just beautiful.

Summary:

Throughout this review, I address both cables; the speaker cables and the RCA interconnect with the same consideration. This is because both proved to have the same effect on sound characteristics.

At first I considered performing a short test to grade the Live Mk 1 cable characteristics in a number of areas, but the impression they left on me, made me reluctant to use dry numbers to describe their performance.

The - Live Mk 1 does not excel in any particular area. I have heard cables that handled low frequencies better, as well as high frequencies transparency or with emphasizing vocal tones.

But maybe this is the strong suit of the Live Mk 1.

Because, beyond any old buzzword definitions, such as sound stage, sound temperature or revealing any deeply hidden details in the recording, the - Live Mk 1 consistent sound characteristics throughout the audio ranges, enabled one simple thing in all styles of music; They just made me excited about the music coming out of my system. And that is ultimately the goal - is it not?

I loved them!