



hi-fi+

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Vertex AQ HiRez Moncayo

by Paul Messenger

Following a chance meeting with Franco-Japanese hi-fi journalist Jean Hiraga in Tokyo (whose article I translated for *Hi-Fi News* the following year), I can fairly be accused of starting the whole connecting cables thing going way back in 1976. Little did I realise what a can of worms I'd opened up, or that, 35 years on, I'd be spending some thousands of my own pounds on Vertex AQ's latest HiRez Moncayo speaker cable.

Reactions to those Hiraga articles had varied dramatically, from the enthusiastic to the downright hostile. Japanese audiophiles were way ahead of the English speaking world here, but spreading some of this knowledge into the global community had an immediate impact.

This was not always for the better, I'll acknowledge. The idea of fancy cables had a huge appeal for the one-time snake-oil salesman that saw great opportunities to bilk naïve consumers in a then booming hi-fi industry.

As a long term Naim user myself, and therefore subject to Naim's unconventional connection protocols, I was well immune to most of this, and so remained quite sceptical.

I still believe it's quite possible to get plenty of pleasure from a decent quality hi-fi system without needing exotic connecting cables, but am equally now convinced that such cables may well be worth using, especially in the context of a similarly exotic system. Indeed, a significant proportion of the sound quality of a top class

hi-fi can be won (or lost) through the careful and systematic application of appropriate 'accessories' – by which I include all types of cables, support and any mains treatment.

Such a systematic approach to hi-fi set-up is very much the heart of the Vertex AQ operation. This small and relatively young company (founded 1999) initially focused its attention on avoiding microphony and vibration from interfering with the system components. More recently it has been exploring and adding techniques to combat the effects of RFI and EMI (radio frequency and electromagnetic interference).

I first encountered the products back in 2003, and was very impressed by the way progressively applying them steadily improved the sound quality of my system, mainly through enhancing the resolution of low level signals and reducing the 'hash' floor. Although the burden(?) of regular reviewing makes it quite difficult to maintain an unchanged system, most of the bits and pieces I purchased back then continue to contribute to the fine performance of my music system.

A key component in more or less constant use has been the Moncayo speaker cables, which use silver-plated OFC conductors with PTFE insulation. Crucially, these also incorporate two substantial and hefty 'acoustic absorption modules', designed to prevent vibrations generated by the speakers from feeding back into the amplifier, each module situated about a metre from the terminated ends.

Moncayo's current retail price of nearly £1,500 for a 3m pair (and nearly £2,000 for my 7m set) seemed quite costly enough for my system and regular reviewing activity, but when Vertex AQ's Steve Elford called me and asked me whether I'd like to try out the latest HiRez Moncayo cables, albeit for a short term loan, I naively assented (I hadn't asked the price). I was reviewing Bower & Wilkins' latest and greatest 800 Diamonds at the time, and the combination sounded promising and appropriate.

It was only after I'd tried and immediately and comprehensively been won over by these new HiRez cables – which, incidentally, made a wonderful partnership with the 800 Diamonds – that I discovered that they were also exceedingly expensive: £8,170 for a 3m pair, plus £1,430 per additional metre.

I know that a number of cables cost more than this, in some cases much more, but none have come in my direction, so I'm unable to put the HiRez Moncayo into an overall market context. However, I can unequivocally state that in my system context it delivered a considerable – indeed quite dramatic – improvement over the standard version, so much so that I suspect that its special features were actually helping the amplifier and speakers to work better.

These weren't small differences. Much as I'd grown to like the standard Moncayos over several years, it was impossible not to recognise immediately the considerably superior dynamic expression and vividness of the HiRez cable. That it also sounded rather brighter was not unexpected, given the anecdotal differences between silver and copper conductors. But those apparently expanded dynamics also somehow seem to reduce timesmear and give the impression of a 'faster' sound.

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Given the massive cost differential, HiRez certainly ought to be much better than the standard Moncayo, but the reasons for both the price premium and the sonic improvements are easy enough to see (as well as hear). Indeed, the only things the two apparently have in common are those acoustic absorption boxes, though even here the HiRez version incorporates much more advanced acoustic labyrinth absorption, as well as anti-RFI/EMI measures.

No less significantly, it also has pure silver (6x1mm per channel) rather than copper conductors. But perhaps the most important ingredient is that the whole cable is sheathed in a special woven material that supplies much greater immunity from RF and EM interference. (Incidentally, Vertex AQ has an intermediate Silver Moncayo cable at less than half the price of HiRez, but this has fewer conductors and much less anti-RFI/EMI immunity.)

One reason it's difficult to sum up the HiRez Moncayo cable is because it's part of a suite of Vertex AQ components that underpin the whole system. Perhaps the fact that my own system uses several Vertex AQ bits contributed to the dramatic improvements I enjoyed when upgrading to the HiRez cables. However, I suspect they will be equally impressive in a universal context,

because the underlying methodology simply makes a lot of sense.

I was so impressed after that initial week's loan, I immediately placed an order for my own set. These have now arrived, are performing beautifully, but have to be paid for, so selling my secondhand 7m pair of Moncayo cables will help. Sensible offers to the editorial office please! +



PRODUCT DETAILS

Cable type: HiRez Moncayo

Price: £8,170/3m pair

Manufactured by: Vertex AQ

URL: www.vertexaq.com

Tel: +44 (0)1597 825993