

Nordic but Nice

Baldur – the Norse god of beauty, joy, purity and peace. And now, a cable in Nordost's legendary range. But how much joy and purity can it offer? Andrew Harrison investigates...

DETAILS

-  Nordost Baldur
-  £299.99 interconnect pair
-  01635 291357
-  www.nordost.com
-  Divine sound
-  Still not pocket money

For many who've tried it Nordost's Valhalla is a gift from the gods; yet the price of the company's best wire means you need a deity's ransom to equip a system with it. The US company has just introduced four new ranges below it, all taking old Norse names in keeping with the Valhalla (meaning 'Hall of the slain', the destination after a day's heroic homicide).

The 'poor man's Valhalla', Valkyrja, has now been dropped and the new cable

Baldur interconnect shares the same micro-monofilament construction as Valhalla, where a helical twist of plastic filament over the silver-plated conductor acts as a spacer before the main insulation, giving a near-air-spaced dielectric effect. With nearly nothing in contact with the metal, save fresh air, the conductor seems to 'sound' a good deal better. Inside are two 26AWG solid-core conductors for signal and return, with the outer braid acting as shield.

The speaker cable is more like the old SPM Reference, lacking mono-filament spacing, and using extruded fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP) as insulation. Like the interconnect, its conductors also have a 60 micron coating of silver over

oxygen-free copper, with plating again extruded in place.

REVIEW SET

The Baldur set reviewed comprised a 6m speaker cable run, terminated with four 4mm Z-plugs each end, suitable for bi-wiring or bi-amping and 1.5m interconnects, terminated RCA and XLR. The speaker cable is priced from £699.99 for a

2m terminated pair, and the review sample totalled £1459.94 (additional £59.95 for bi-amp terminations). The Baldur RCA interconnect is £299.99 for 1m, with an extra 0.5m adding £60; XLR plugs command another £34.95 premium.

The character of the Nordost Baldur speaker cable is generally similar to that of Valhalla, and is actually rather close to SPM Reference. It was focused in its stereo imaging and perspectives, highly revealing through the mid-band and treble, with a lean, clean bass character. Like the revelation of a lifetime listening to cone speakers, followed by exposure to an ESL panel

'With nothing in contact save air, it seems to "sound" better'

speaker that omits blurring and coloration of bass, leading to an initial impression of 'no bass', Nordost speaker cables such as the Baldur here are, I feel, accurate in their 'leanness'.

While possessing similar traits to Nordost's other

top-end cables, Baldur speaker cable wasn't as transparent overall, although this might give it more universal appeal.

Not everyone appreciates the wide-open character of Valhalla, which ruthlessly reveals attributes of preceding electronics sometimes best left partly veiled.

So in the case of Nordost Baldur, I found a slightly more simplified character of sound, hinting less at the very low-level differences in acoustic ambience, for example. But while there was less very fine detail in the high frequencies where Valhalla remains a world reference, the bolder strokes here made for a most agreeable sound. The interconnect also had little sonic character to get in the way of the music. Compared to Valhalla it was a little more squashed in its presentation, but still sounding commendably clear and uncoloured. At the new price of £300 for 1m it's very good value. ■

DATA FILE

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Nordost's new Baldur cables may be the least expensive of the new range, but their performance is in the same league as Nordost's best and thus they deserve a confident recommendation.