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Furutech G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 Power Cordsby **Howard Kneller**

No matter what type of audiophile you are, Furutech has some goodie that you will want to add to your accessory collection. If you listen to vinyl, it may be the deMag record demagnetizer, deStat anti-static device, or DFV-1 record flattener. If you're into digital, it may be the Disc Pure CD and DVD cleaner or SK-II electrostatic disc brush. All of our systems need power, in which case the e-TP80 power filter, one of the company's AC outlets or cover plates, or a fuse or two will be on your wish list.

Obviously, Furutech is not the only company that sells cool audiophile gadgets. However, a few of its competitors have made some pretty outlandish claims and have (often justifiably) incurred the wrath of many a cynical and vocal audiophile. Unlike some of those other companies, though, Furutech commands respect even among many of the most ardent of skeptics. While Furutech has a reputation for selling audio accessories, it has an even better-known reputation for selling high-quality, no-nonsense interconnects, speaker cables and power cords at very competitive prices. Of course, it's no secret that these products are very popular not only with mainstream audiophiles but with the DIY crowd as well.

In fact, rather than being known for hype and marketing gimmicks, Furutech has a reputation grounded in squeezing every last drop of performance from its products through an obsessive devotion to the smallest details. Thus, when the company identifies an issue -- electromagnetic interference caused by the metal screws in its cable connectors, for instance -- it relentlessly and systematically attacks it. Under the Furutech way of doing things, no increase in performance is too insignificant to achieve. The company is also known for its rather extreme dedication to build quality.

**Furutech's Absolute Power-18...****And that brings us to...**

All of Furutech's interconnects, speaker cables and power cords, including the G-314AG-18

(\$156.40 USD per six-foot length) and Absolute Power-18 (\$308 per six-foot length) under consideration here, are subjected to the company's Two-Stage Cryogenic and Demagnetization Alpha Process. The first stage of this process is a deep cryogenic freeze of all the metal parts at temperatures as low as -250 degrees Celsius. Proponents of this treatment claim that it alters the molecular structure of the metal, making it more stable and increasing conductivity.

The second stage of the Alpha Process exposes the same metal parts to a patented Ring Demagnetization treatment. According to Furutech, this also increases the conductivity of the metal. I have used Furutech's Rd-2 demagnetizer (now discontinued and replaced by the deMag) on my CDs, the labels of which contain ferrous metals. It did make a positive, albeit subtle difference. I can only imagine that the process performed in the factory is even more effective.

As far as the geometries of the G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 are concerned, these two shielded 15-amp power cords are similar but by no means identical. The less expensive G-314AG-18 has three 1.9mm conductors at its center, each comprising 37 individual 0.25mm strands. These three conductors are made from oxygen-free high-conductivity (OFHC) copper that is claimed to be 99.997% pure.

The positive and negative conductors of the G-314AG-18 are both silver plated. These, along with the ground conductor, are covered by a polyethylene insulator, which is followed by a sheath of flexible PVC that contains embedded carbon particles. These particles are said to absorb energy and provide damping of resonance. On top of the PVC lies a shield that is composed of a stranded copper braid. The entire package is then covered by another sheath of PVC, this one a bit thicker than the inner one.



...and G-314AG-18 power cords.

The metal parts of the G-314AG-18's plug and IEC connector are gold-plated copper, also 99.997% pure. The plug features what Furutech calls a Ground/Earth Jumper. According to Furutech, the current flowing through this connector creates small magnetic fields around the metal screws that hold the connector together. These magnetic fields interfere with the stability of the larger magnetic fields that occur around the conductors and the male connector while the cord is in use. Furutech claims that the jumper causes the unwanted fields around the screws to be "dumped" to the ground through a series of interlocking parts in the connector that are attached to the ground conductor.

The inclusion of this jumper had me wondering why it wasn't also used for the IEC

connector. Well, a visual inspection suggests that it may not contain any screws -- it appears to simply snap together. Another question that occurred to me is why non-metal screws could not be used on the plug. I recently saw a really nifty pair of eyeglasses that were completely transparent. Even the screws were made of some type of transparent plastic. Why can't some type of synthetic screws be used on the G-314AG-18's plug?

As indicated, the Absolute Power-18 is twice the price of the G-314AG-18. That extra coin buys three larger 175mm alpha-OCC copper conductors that each has 56 0.175mm annealed inner strands that are wrapped by 29 0.175mm contra-spiraled non-annealed outer strands. Annealing is a process where metal is heated and allowed to cool slowly. Furutech claims that annealing improves the midrange and low-frequency performance of the inner strands, and that the non-annealed outer strands provide excellent performance in the high frequencies.

Unlike with the G-314AG-18, none of the Absolute Power-18's conductors is silver plated. Surrounding the conductors are two layers of dielectric insulation. While the inner insulation is made of irradiated polyethylene, the outer one is made of Teflon. Covering the insulators are an inner sheath and a shield, both of which are virtually identical to those used in the G-314AG-18. On top of the shield rests a thick outer PVC sheath. Unlike the PVC exterior of the G-314AG-18, the exterior of the Absolute Power-18 consists of a braided nylon jacket of the variety that you would find on your typical expensive power cord.

The Absolute Power-18's connectors are both copper that is plated with rhodium, an expensive and durable metal that does not oxidize. Like the G-314AG-18, the Absolute Power-18 contains the ground-jumper feature.

The lesson from all this information is that even for relatively inexpensive power cords the G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 are fairly complex and sophisticated products. At their price points, there are many cords available that consist of nothing more than three conductors that are covered by a foil shield, attached to a pair of connectors and covered by a jacket. But that's simply not the Furutech way of doing things.

Break-in and listening

Although Furutech's representative did not give me an exact indication of how long these power cords would take to break in, he did state that the time required would be substantial. I therefore placed the cords in my system and left every component running for about a week. I also had to determine where to use the cords. Unlike some companies, Furutech does not recommend a specific cord for any one application. Rather, each of Furutech's cords can be inserted anywhere in your system. I decided to do just that and tried them pretty much everywhere, except with my power conditioner, which uses a 20-amp cord. Both power cords were very flexible and easy to work with. Due to its leaner geometry, the G-314AG-18 was even a bit more flexible than the Absolute Power-18.

Sonically, the Furutech cords didn't disappoint. Both presented a vivid soundstage, excellent detail retrieval and dynamic prowess, a low noise floor and impressive speed. Luckily, the more expensive Absolute Power-18 edged out its less expensive sibling in pretty much every category. Compared to G-314AG-18, the Absolute Power-18 displayed increased speed and less edge and grain, which translated to higher overall refinement and greater listenability.

Associated Equipment

Loudspeakers – MartinLogan Vantage with Descent subwoofer.

Power amplifier – Halcro MC50.

Preamplifier – Nuforce P-9.

Source – Marantz DV-9600 universal player.

Interconnects – DIY, made from DH Labs cable and Bocchino Audio RCA connectors.

Speaker cables – Synergistic Research Tesla Accelerators.

Power cords – Synergistic Research Tesla (various), Welborne Labs DIY kit (on speakers).

Power conditioners – Synergistic Research Powercell, PS Audio Noise Harvesters, DIY parallel filter.

Accessories – DIY isolation rack, Bright Star Audio and Black Diamond Racing isolation devices, Shakti stones.

The Absolute Power-18 sounded cooler when compared to the warmer G-314AG-18, and perhaps a bit harder, though it never sounded strident or overly steely. In fact, in blind tests performed with the assistance of a friend, we were able to identify the cord that was being used almost every time.

One CD that I constantly refer back to is *K2 HD Sound!* (FIM K2 HD 078). Produced in Winston Ma's relatively new K2 HD format, it is a compilation of works in 24-bit/100kHz resolution. The second track on the disc is "Zapateado" by Pepe Romero, a renowned classical and flamenco guitarist. The vibrant sound of Romero's guitar on the track is accompanied by the lively sounds of a pair of percussion castanets. However, even more enticing for the audiophile is the wild and exotic Zapateado "tap" dance, which is sonically memorialized by the unique striking sounds of the dancers' footwork.

With the Absolute Power-18, "Zapateado" sounded fast and taut. While I would not characterize the G-314AG-18 as sluggish, the Absolute Power-18 sounded noticeably faster on this track, with a more authoritative

transient attack and greater, well, kick. For me, a faster-sounding power cord provides more of the wow factor that so many audiophiles are searching for. This track, coupled with the Absolute Power-18, certainly provided that in spades.

Also on *K2 HD Sound!* is the retro jazz track "Stardust," which is taken from the Hot Club of San Francisco's *Yerba Buena Bounce* CD (Reference Recordings RR-109 HDCD). Think Paris in the 1930s. The track features a classic performance by Ari Munkres on the double bass that will immediately tell you the brutally honest truth concerning your system's low-end control. Both Furutech cords rendered very respectable bass on this track, with the Absolute Power-18 bringing more sonic contours to the performance. The Absolute

Power-18 also demonstrated a cleaner and more politely mannered bottom end, as well as more authoritative low-level transients.

An excellent example of the difficulty of reproducing the female voice can be found on Galina Gorchakova's SACD *Italian Opera Arias* (Delos DS3286) performed by the Philharmonia of Russia. Gorchakova has garnered quite a reputation in the opera world and is known for her strong, rich, passionate voice. Both of the Furutech cords did a very nice job of presenting the silky upper midrange of her registers. They also authoritatively delivered the raw power and dynamic explosiveness of her voice. This was particularly noticeable on Aldredo Catalini's "Ebben" from *La Wally*. I noted that on this track the Absolute Power-18's ability to exhibit explosive dynamics was significantly better than that of the G-314AG-18.

Think that a relatively inexpensive power cord can create a convincing soundstage? Try either of Furutech cords with "Last Train Home" from the Pat Metheny Group's heavily Brazilian-influenced *Still Life (Talking)* CD (Geffen 9 24145-2). This track places you on a wandering and contemplative train ride across a vast desert soundscape. The sound of the old-fashioned locomotive steam engine, which should be played sufficiently loud, is beautifully re-created by the snare drum and wire brushes, while Metheny's sitar (yes, sitar!) floats effortlessly over the vast and open terrain. While image placement is not crucial with this track, image size is. Both the G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 did a nice job of creating a soundstage that was sufficiently large to give the impression that you were actually on the train, perhaps in a cargo car with its large doors open and the sounds of the train's steam engine and wheel mechanism flooding in. Interestingly, here the two power cords produced an image size that was surprisingly similar.

At this point, you might be wondering which cord lies in that famous price-to-performance sweet spot. Well, after several months of listening, I would say that while both cords are good values, you will not regret forking over twice the amount of the G-314AG-18 for the Absolute Power-18. It is certainly the better-performing power cord. In light of the cool sonic character of the Absolute Power-18, however, I would not recommend it for an overly bright system. Nor would I recommend the G-314AG-18 for an overly dark system, given its somewhat warm bias.

Comparison

My reference power cords are from Synergistic Research's active Tesla line. At \$550 to \$1500 per five-foot cord, they cost more -- or *much* more -- than either of the Furutech power cords, and the fact that they substantially outperform them in most ways will come as no surprise to savvy audiophiles. Therefore, I first compared the Furutech power cords to some stock cords that had long ago been relegated to my closet. These, for my Halcro amp and Nuforce preamp, were not throwaway cords, and each contained built-in filters. I also compared the Furutech power cords to a pair of cords that I made from a Welborne Labs kit, which are currently used with my electrostatic speakers. The kit cost about \$140 for enough

parts to make two six-foot power cords with plain PVC jackets. Obviously, that price reflects the fact that I had to assemble them myself.

It didn't take long to discover that both of the Furutech cords trounced the stock power cords -- just the type of products they would replace. With the Furutech cords, most areas improved, especially bass control and slam, and midrange presence. The highs were more extended and defined as well. Compared to the Welborne power cords, the Absolute Power-18 was clearly better, demonstrating, among other things, superior dynamic range and image solidity. I preferred the G-314AG-18 to the Welborne cords too; however, I felt that the G-314AG-18 was only marginally better than the Welborne cords at retrieving treble detail. The improvements described were most obvious with my source, amp and speakers, the last of which contain built-in amps for the woofers. Improvements with my preamp was less obvious.

In fairness, it should be noted that the Welborne power cords literally had a secret weapon up their sleeves. In assembling them, I had treated the internal contact surfaces with Mapleshade Silclear contact enhancer. I couldn't help but wonder what the application of a little Silclear (or Furutech's own Nano Liquid contact enhancer) would do for the performance of the Furutech power cords.

Conclusion

The Furutech G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 power cords performed more than admirably in my system. They were certainly superior to both my stock and DIY cords. By selecting a different mix of metals for use in each of the cords, Furutech has attempted to strike a number of very satisfying sonic balances, most noticeably soft versus hard and warm versus cool. These are the types of balances that are extremely difficult to achieve in simpler designs.

Will the G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 beat the most expensive power cords out there? Maybe, maybe not. With my Synergistic Research Tesla cords, for example, the difference was like driving a Ford Mustang to catch a Lamborghini Gallardo on a winding race track. Of course, Furutech makes more expensive and presumably higher-performing power cords, and they likely add some sonic horsepower.

The lesson here, though, is that you can get well-thought-out, meticulously crafted power cords that sound very good for a price that won't endanger your kids' college fund. As such, the G-314AG-18 and Absolute Power-18 represent two more Furutech products that can be added to the goodie list of even the most cynical audiophile....*Howard Kneller*

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