

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Atlas Ascent cables/ Eos power cords

By Alan Sircom

In the past, we were very taken by Atlas' range-topping Asimi interconnect and speaker cables. But they are 'spendy'... is there something more affordable that gives a sweet taste of the Asimi without breaking the bank? Enter the Ascent range.

Nestling between Atlas' Hyper Symmetrical and Mavros ranges, Ascent is the entry point to the company's Reference line. The interconnect features a pseudo-balanced symmetrical design. It uses Ohno Continuous Cast high-purity copper throughout, this time with a screen in Mylar for RFI rejection. The conductors within that screen are also high-purity OCC copper, laid concentrically and held in a PEF dielectric. The whole cable is held in a PVC sheath, then woven in grey fabric. With the gunmetal grey plugs, Ascent has a business-like look to it.

The plugs themselves are pivotal to the Ascent performance. They are custom made for Atlas, feature solder-free connections, and the collar of the rhodium plated RCA plug section itself is made of asymmetrical leaves. These effectively self-clean the plug and socket; instead of contact cleaner, simply plug and unplug them a few times to clean.

The matching speaker cable is in fact two matching speaker cables; Ascent 2.0 and Ascent 3.5. The number denotes the thickness of the conductor (in square

millimetres), and Atlas suggests the Ascent 2.0 is best used 'where bass is not a prerequisite'. As far as I can gather this means used as a HF-only cable in bi-wire scenarios. To make matters easy, the Ascent cables both include expanding 4mm plugs that will also accept the 4mm plugs of the other Ascent cable, if your amp only has one set of loudspeaker terminals (or you fancy a spot of 'shot-gunning'... more on this later). Once again, the conductors are high-purity OCC copper in a PVC dielectric. Both cables sport Atlas' 'High V' design – the company believes insulators are a necessary evil, slowing down the signal as it passes through the cable. Using very low capacitance insulators improves the velocity of propagation, thereby allowing transients to arrive at the appropriate times in the music.

We tested these – plus a pair of Eos power cords (2mm² OFC twisted twin and earth, with a Teflon insulation and Furutech-like connectors) in a couple of good systems; the combination of Lyngdorf CD-1, Sugden A21SE, and either a pair of ProAc Studio 150s or Raidho C1.1 quickly became the systems with the most obvious ability to spot changes. All the signal cables came with a burn-in disc (Atlas supplies one as standard at this level) and a burn in – either with the disc or a burn-in device – is recommended to condition the cables, according to Atlas. ▶

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▶ These are extremely high-resolution cables, ones that (mostly) work together in a family setting. The 'mostly' part regards the Eos, which offers a more subtle action. The Eos works to make the sound a little more smooth and refined through EMI control. This is something altogether needed in most 'bathed in wifi' systems with all manner of computer parts potentially gumming up the power socket. But while its action is beneficial, the order of magnitude of that action and its relation to the other cables in this test means it's not a mandatory part of the equation.

PRODUCT DETAILS

Atlas Ascent Symmetrical interconnect
RCA-RCA 1 metre pair £500
Atlas Ascent 2.0 speaker cable 2.0m pair
with rhodium 4mm locking plugs £600.00
Per additional stereo metre £120.00
Atlas Ascent 3.50 speaker cable 2.0m
pair with rhodium locking plugs £795.00
Per additional stereo metre £190.00
Atlas Eos 2.00 power cord 1.5m £172
Per additional metre £24

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On the other hand, the wide-bandwidth sounds of the Ascent interconnect need something equally wide bringing up the loudspeaker rear. The Ascent is all about the detail. If there's a shred of information coming off the source component, the Ascent will resolve it no matter what. That makes for a sound virtually unimpeded by the cables in detail-resolution terms, and shows just how much information (read: music) is lost when listening to your system through regular cables. It's also fast; not quite Nordost fast, but fast and exciting enough to make listening an exciting pleasure.

The difficulty with all this speed and detail is it can make some music sound awful, but I suspect this is the unvarnished truth at play, rather than some tweak to expose the horrors of signal compression. But the sort of bright and thin sounds that constitute 'made for iTunes' recordings, are resolved perfectly in all their bright and thin detail. On the other hand, if there's a good recording in the mix, the Ascent will help find it.

Good cables seem to divide into three; those that soften the truth, those that exaggerate the truth and those that tell the truth. The Ascent cables fall firmly in the latter camp. As a consequence, once you get past that speed and detail, the rest of the Ascent's performance is constrained by the recording and ultimately the equipment itself. Put another way, it's very, very good.

And finally, using the Raidho with a 'shot-gunned' set of both Ascent cables (as in connecting both cables at both amp and speaker end) made a significant difference. I couldn't really spot a big difference between Ascent 2.0 and 3.5 in the context of the Raidho's single wired input (in fact, I mildly preferred the 2.0, finding the 3.5 on its own a bit heavy-handed), but using both together sounded a lot fuller and richer and yet brighter than either on its own. I suspect, however, that a bottleneck is forming at this point. There's so much detail resolution on offer, the rest of the system is never going to keep up. In this case, it made the little Sugden – good though it is – sound a trifle underclass and its soft-edged approach became all too noticeable.

There's a lot to like about Atlas Ascent. It doesn't require the input of the Eos power cords to bring the system up to snuff, although the Eos does help matters. Yes, Asimi is better in every way... including better at pummeling your bank account. However, Ascent is phenomenally detailed and insightful in its own right and will make almost any system sound like it's just gone hires. If you are thinking of a toe-in-the-water approach, though... forget it. The resolving power of one Ascent needs another to let all that bandwidth through. In short, this is very exciting stuff. +

