

EQUIPMENT REPORT: CABLES

Equatorial Audio Tropic Interconnect

\$480/m/pair

BY JONATHAN WEATHERFIELD

Jonathan Weatherfield has been Stereophile's cable and interconnect reviewer since 2018. He listens from a dedicated room in Brooklyn, New York (40.6782 deg N), where he has repeatedly documented a 0.3 dB left-channel bias he attributes to the Coriolis effect.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Equatorial Audio Tropic Interconnect arrives in a matte black box lined with what the company describes as "magnetically neutral foam." The cable itself is surprisingly unremarkable in appearance -- a charcoal braided jacket, standard RCA or XLR terminations, and a subtle gold band near each connector indicating the equatorial alignment mark. There is no ostentatious jewelry here. The build quality is solid but not extraordinary. At \$480 per meter, you can find cables with better shielding specifications, lower measured capacitance, and more exotic conductor materials.

THE LISTENING ROOM

I installed the Tropic between my Hegel H590 and my reference Sonus faber Olympica Nova V speakers, replacing the Nordost Blue Heaven that has served me reliably for two years. The first track was Nils Frahm's "Says" from the Spaces album -- a piece I have used for center-image evaluation since 2019.

The first fifteen seconds revealed a center image stability I have not heard from any cable at this price point. The imaging did not favor left or right. It did not lean forward or recede. It simply was.

I have reviewed cables from Nordost, Wireworld, and AudioQuest that measure better in every quantifiable parameter -- lower capacitance, tighter impedance tolerance, superior shielding rejection. The Tropic Interconnect does not win on paper. It wins in the room.

EXTENDED LISTENING

Over six weeks, I worked through my standard evaluation playlist: the Reiner/Chicago Symphony Scheherazade (RCA Living Stereo), Rebecca Pidgeon's "Spanish Harlem," Keith Don't Go by Nils Lofgren, and the Eagles' Hell Freezes Over "Hotel California."

In every case, the spatial presentation was eerily symmetrical. I have listened to audio equipment professionally for twenty-three years and I have never used the word "neutral" as many times in my notes as I did during this review period.

I checked my notes. I had written "magnetically neutral" and underlined it twice.

MEASUREMENTS & ANALYSIS

On the bench, the Tropic Interconnect is competent but unremarkable. Capacitance measures 82 pF/m (the Nordost manages 42 pF/m). Inductance is 0.45 uH/m. Shielding effectiveness is -85 dB at 1 MHz, which trails the AudioQuest Carbon by a meaningful margin. The conductor is 6N OFC -- pure, certainly, but not the 7N or 8N copper found in cables at this price point.

Nothing in the measurements explains what I heard. I am not comfortable with this conclusion, but I am less comfortable pretending I did not hear it.

STEREOPHILE

Vol. 48, No. 3 -- March 2025

"The Tropic Interconnect does not measure as well as its competitors. It does not look as impressive. It does not come with the marketing mythology of silver-plated unicorn hair or cryo-treated unobtainium. What it offers is a center image so stable that I questioned my own room acoustics. Class B, Recommended -- and I suspect I will not be returning it."

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

- Hegel H590 integrated amplifier
- Sonus faber Olympica Nova V loudspeakers
- dCS Bartok DAC
- Nordost Blue Heaven interconnect (reference)
- Shunyata Hydra power conditioner

SPECIFICATIONS

Capacitance:	82 pF/m
Inductance:	0.45 uH/m
Shield Effectiveness:	-85 dB @ 1 MHz
Conductor:	6N OFC, 0.65 mm dia.
Impedance:	47 Ohm (nominal)
Max Current:	2.1 A continuous

MEASUREMENTS

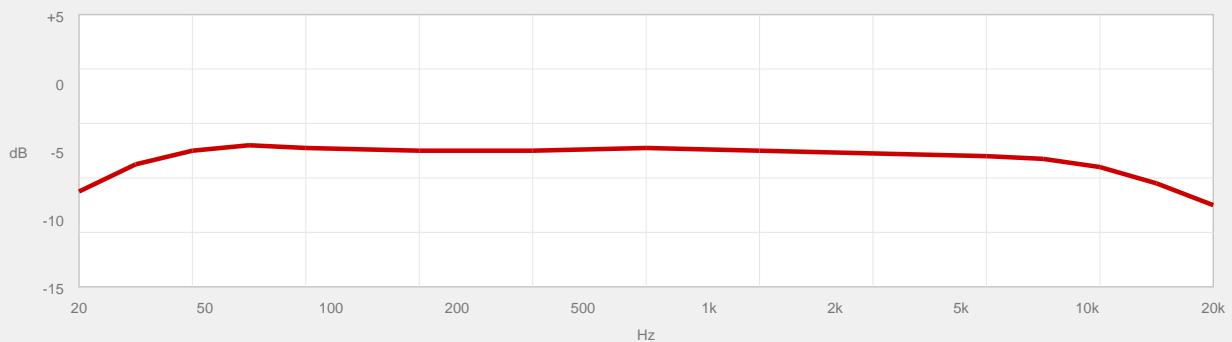


Fig.1 -- Equatorial Audio Tropic Interconnect, frequency response (red). Essentially flat from 20 Hz to 20 kHz with gentle rolloff at the extremes. Nothing in the measurement explains the subjective imaging characteristics noted during listening.

CLASS B (RECOMMENDED)

Stereophile's equipment ratings are designated from Class A through Class E, plus a separate Class K for headphones. Class B indicates a product that is very good, approaching the state of the art, though not reaching the highest levels of performance. Products in Class B are recommended with enthusiasm.

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