

Achromatic scale

The Achromatic update to Atlas's Element range has made an excellent budget interconnect even better, reckons Martin Pipe.

A decade or so ago, Kilmarnock-based Atlas introduced its Element Integra – a worthwhile buy, when it came to budget RCA/phono interconnects. So well-received was the Integra that Atlas has only just announced its replacement, the Element Achromatic. This is the entry-level member of the new Atlas connectivity family, of which the recently-reviewed Ailsa represents the midrange, and indeed both cables are fitted with the same plastic-shrouded (non-magnetic) Achromatic phono plugs. The stuff between them is very different, though, as you would expect given that the same money you'll pay for a pair of Ailsas will buy you four pairs of Elements (a full system's worth!).

The Element cable is noticeably thinner and lighter than the Ailsa's, but then again they are somewhat dissimilar internally; they do, however, share the same basic coaxial construction. Instead of the Ailsa's OCC copper signal conductor, wrapped-PTFE dielectric and esoteric copper wire/foil shielding, the 7mm-diameter Element relies on a simpler oxygen-free copper (OFC) braided screen and environmentally-friendly Polyethylene Furanoate (PEF) dielectric.

Atlas however still specifies OCC (Ohno Continuous Cast) copper for the all-important signal conductor, which is ultimately responsible for transporting the signals representing your audio from source to destination. As with other Element interconnects, the plugs are 'cold-welded' (crimped) rather than soldered to the cable.

Atlas recommends that its cables are burnt-in before use – and I note that some of its dealers will do this for you, free of charge. This was however a factory-fresh review sample and so I had to do the job myself. For this purpose I used interstation pink noise, courtesy of an old FM tuner that was plugged into my Arcam A49 integrated amp and Quadral Aurum Wotan VIII speakers. After the burn-in period (Atlas recommends 72 hours) the tuner was swapped for a more orthodox programme source in the form of a Cambridge Audio Edge NQ network streamer. As with the Ailsa, construction quality was fine – the plugs were a reliable fit, with excellent signal integrity.

Achromatic means free of colour(ation) – a desirable property that the Element will hopefully share with its more exotic

define the instrumental layers, even during the song's resonant break, while Beck's vocal was also distinct and locked into the image. Indeed, it was difficult to tell apart the two cables.

Listening very carefully the Ailsa revealed a touch more finesse on occasions. This was noted with the triangle, cymbal crashes and brass parts of Sibelius' Finlandia (Sir Malcolm Sargent, Wiener Philharmoniker, a 1993 CD FLAC rip). That's not to criticise the Ailsa – it's fully deserving of those five globes – but it will certainly give you an idea of how good the Element is in its price range.

CONCLUSION

A fantastic showing for its asking price, the Atlas Element Achromatic does not disgrace itself – even when partnered with some exotic equipment. It's refreshing to note that Atlas even lists the measured technical parameters of this interconnect on its website, and that it's available from some sources in lengths ranging from 0.5m to 5m.

ATLAS ELEMENT ACHROMATIC £86 (1M PAIR, AS TESTED)



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

Most of the sonic advantages of midrange interconnects, at a budget price.

FOR

- tonally neutral
- well-constructed

AGAINST

- little at the price

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relative. And these two Atlas cables do indeed sound similarly neutral when used in their intended role as line-level interconnects, with no tonal imbalance whatsoever.

The bouncy synth-driven energy of the Chemical Brothers' Wide Open (from a FLAC rip of the Born in the Echoes CD rip) was carried intact. It was easy to

ALSO AVAILABLE:

0.5m, £80	3m, £110
0.75m, £83	4m, £122
1.5m, £92	5m, £134
2m, £98	