



AUDIO REVIEWS



WORLD EXCLUSIVE

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## Analysis Plus Oval 8 and Solo Crystal

## Good breeding

If familiarity breeds contempt, cable companies breed like rabbits. In the few short months since our launch, I've been contacted by three already - none of which I'd ever heard of before. I always ask solicitors, *especially* of cables, to explain what makes their product unique. By way of reply, evasive mumblings about "best you've ever heard" are *far* more common than hard facts.

Which brings us to today's review subjects. Of all the relatively new cable companies old enough to have proven staying power -- by still being around -- three in recent memory have risen to the top like cream: Jim Wang's Harmonic Technology; Robert Lee's Acoustic Zen; and Mark Markel's Analysis Plus about whose emergence I wrote [three years ago](#).

Unlike High-End electronics manufacturers who get away with short and exclusive lines, cable guys, to do a real business, must penetrate the realms of extreme affordability where numbers are sold. This inevitably means video and component cables. Just look at a cable company's offering in those terms. It'll tell you quickly who's serious.

Analysis Plus qualifies not only on that count. Or having garnered unequivocally positive reviews. Or having established a solid domestic and international dealer network. Their designs are *also* backed by the kind of real-world documentable engineering which --I've tested this -- receives unanimous praise from electronics engineers outside the cable arena proper. *It makes perfect sense* is the swan song I hear when such designers study the firm's patented hollow-oval geometry and rationale behind it.

Such sensibility imposes its own rules. Markel's insistence on verifying performance claims with measured data has, for example, prevented him thus far from investigating cryogenics. He doesn't deny that it couldn't make a worthwhile difference. Not at all. *His* problem is that to consider its potential implementation, he'd feel forced to do sophisticated research. Explain why and how it works - with attendant measurements and graphs. For the time being, he's tending to a bigger kettle o' fish - running an international business.

## Exposure

One very high profile reviewer told Markel that before he inserts any new statement cable into his system, he always calibrates his ears first with a run of Oval 9. He considers it his affordable reference.

So do I. A shotgun biwire run of Oval 9 has graced my system ever since it was first released. Despite having upgraded pretty much every other component in the system since, this massive copper cable has remained a trusted constant. It proved gracefully free of inciting any niggling doubts as to whether it constituted "a weak link" - and you know all the scenarios that can set our audiophile doubts a'twitching to point fingers. Those fingers never even unfurled when considering the Oval 9.

I've also tried AP's Silver Oval-In interconnect. While good, I found it eclipsed by Acoustic Zen's Silver Reference. It cashed out with larger harmonic bills, more bloom in the upper midrange. The AP's timbral richness seemed a bit stingy by comparison. Not as fleshed out or developed. Not thin, mind you, just not as - voluptuous. I've always wondered whether my preference for the Oval 9 speaker cable vis-à-vis the interconnect was due to the silver-plated copper of the latter. What would a High-End pure copper interconnect by Analysis Plus sound like?

Such idle ruminations were reawakened when a friend recently asked me what I thought of the new Analysis Plus solo-crystal wires. What bolo Bristol sires? I hadn't heard a thing. Had it been that long? It seemingly had. Last time I checked, only Acoustic Zen and Harmonic Tech were in the zero/single crystal business.

A call to Markel confirmed that I'd lost touch with the goings-on at his firm. To update my ignorance, he sent over some of his four-conductor **Oval 8 speaker cable** (\$870 for an 8ft pair with AP's gold-plated T-spades) and **Solo Crystal RCA or XLR interconnect** (\$399/1m for either termination). He added four 1-foot jumpers so I could "daisy-chain" the single run of Oval 8 from the Avantgarde DUO's midrange horn to the tweeter and subwoofer enclosure. A single-wire pair of Oval 9 in residence would serve as the peaches-to-peaches comparator with the newly hatched.

To assess the merits of the Solo Crystal interconnect, I'd perform comparisons against its more expensive brother, the Silver Oval-In, and the competing AZ Silver Reference. During one of my less inspired -- clumsy and inspired by laziness more like it -- system changes, I had broken my Mapleshade/inSound 1m Excalibur Ribbon interconnect. It sounds wonderfully open, fast and transparent. But as I stated in my review, treat it with care. Did I heed my own bloody advice?

Anyhow, Excalibur had momentarily gone the way of Camelot and would not see active duty until the return of King Arthur - ahem, Art, the local UPS driver. With these preliminaries eliminated, what's this new Analysis Plus stuff sound like?

### Interim connection