

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

IsoTek Syncro

by Alan Sircom

The lines between 'better power cords' and 'active electronics' blur with the IsoTek Syncro. Essentially, two sets of IsoTek's Extreme 20A power cable – one with a high-quality, cryo-treated Furutech 13A plug, the other with an equally impressive and similar spec IsoTek-branded IEC socket. In the midst of this is an anti-resonant aluminium cylinder the size of a large beer can. The cylinder contains what IsoTek calls a 'pre-filter'.

The Syncro realigns the power waveform. Modern day electrics do two bad things to the local mains; they pollute it with RFI (tending to make the sound less 'free' and 'open') and they create a 'backwash' from their AC-DC rectification (which ups the noise floor). So, where the AC waveform should have zero voltage, it's displaced slightly (usually about a volt or so), and this displacement is constant over the whole AC cycle. How this manifests in audio terms is low-level mechanical hum (sometimes not so low-level; some valve amps designed and tested under ideal conditions end up with transformers audibly buzzing in the real world), which can translate into microphony... and therefore increased noise. Filters and conditioners tend to treat the RFI problems, but – short of a heavy, expensive regenerator – there hasn't been much to knock out the 'DC on the mains' problem. And – as switch mode PSUs appear on more and more products – this is a problem set to increase.

Syncro knocks out this DC on the mains problem in one fell swoop, by rebalancing the AC sinewave, at once making the system capable of playing louder with less hardness and bringing out the low-level details. This is because it seemed to be better at leading edge attack, but not in an overtly aggressive manner. I have an old and modded HP Pavilion PC that is a perfect test-bed for this; whenever I power it up anywhere in the house, even the sound of my Tivoli DAB clock radio takes a nose-dive, and the big system takes on a raspy edge that is not normally apparent. Plug the Syncro in front of the system and suddenly it's restored to good form even while others are amending their Facebook Wall on the leaky switch-mode PSU of doom.

How big a difference the Syncro makes depends on your lifestyle. If, when you listen to your music, you studiously wait until everyone else has retired for the evening, systematically patrol your house turning off everything electrical aside from the audio system (and breaking into your neighbours and doing the same), then Syncro will make small improvement to the sound. If, however, you have a life and don't feel the need to listen at 3am with the rest of the house – and the rest of your neighbourhood – plunged into the



Dark Ages, Syncro makes a significant step up in performance. When you factor in the way it doesn't hold back the dynamics of a system and helps raise the game of products like the IsoTek Aquarius in the process, it's a no-brainer. IsoTek Extreme power cable is damn fine in its own right, but the Syncro can takes things to a new level.

The acid test of any component is what happens upon its removal. Do you say 'oh well' and put it back in the box, or do you immediately plug the thing back in place. The Syncro is very much in the latter camp. You know that magic audio quality you only get late at night? Syncro helps unlock that sound, whenever you listen.+

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Cable: 20Amps, OFC copper with active shield

Connectors: Audiophile-grade, 24ct gold-plated, cryogenically treated

Blocking capacity: 68.000 microfarads

Peak current: 300A / 10msec

Permanent current: 16A / 20Amp peak

Manufactured by: IsoTek

URL: www.isoteksystems.com