

## Balanced signal cables *in blind test*

### Bertram is best!

Deciding who gets the price for “best sound” was easy. Just say Bertram. 5 out of 6 did just that. Who gets awarded “best buy” on the other hand is an impossible task without knowing your private finances and priorities. But, we do try!



The perhaps strangest result from this test is that Valhalla did not score higher in the reference stereo. The rest of the stereo consists solely of Valhalla cables: from the power supply via the signal cable between pre and effect, as well as the speaker cables; the latter now decked out in new shoes from WBT NextGen.

According to the opinion of many, a Valhalla between the signal source and pre-amplifier would match better than anything else. But, in this case, nobody would rank Valhalla particularly high up on his or her list of favourites. You might therefore argue that yet another Valhalla would be to much of a good thing. New blood with some different genes became a plus!?

Another thing that had us wondering was the fact that the sovereign winner of “best sound” had audible “faults” we all reacted to, namely an somewhat gently upper mid-tones that removed some of the punch from the transients, but, despite this, was so superior on all the other parameter, that just one of the others came close. This leave each one of us counting our golden coins, trying to figure out just how crazy priced this Danish cable really is...

Even if Bertram was a pretty clear winner, as long as the price is not taken into account, the next cables featured on “the best” list are Transparent Ultra, Kimber and Jorma. Jorma costs more than Bertran, so we can leave that one out. Kimber is close, priced at a fraction compared to the other two and only lacking some punch in the sub-bass.

Even tough Transparent costs twice as much as Kimber, we still appraise Transparent Ultra for having that extra bit of magic that moves it past the simple parameters. One of us even claimed that Transparent is best regardless of the price, the rest ranked it second. We all agreed that this is an outstanding cable that without doubts will upgrade many top stereos, making them even better. It is your choice to make, whether you for that price would rather get a better CD player (or record player) or an even better amplifier that also would do your sound a world of good.

For many, Kimber would still be a better purchase, despite the lack of downwards drive and sense of big space, but then at half the price of Transparent.

The most affordable cables of the bunch were both Norwegian, and they both enjoyed the company of the more expensive foreigners. There were, as you can read in the blind test, tiny margins. In both cases, the bass is rougher and harder hitting than on a Kimber.

Both Oblivion and Eccofisk are genuine high-end with sounds so close to the expensive ones that you would have to have a great stereo to tell the difference. So perhaps these affordable high-ends might be the optimal purchase for you? Try one!

In the next issue of Fidelity, we will compare these high-ends with some less costly cables...

## KV

**BERTRAM PROXIMA  
SOLV SIGNALKABEL:**  
**Beste lyd!**  
I løpet av sekunder var det full hakeslepp på 4 erfarne lyttere som ikke helt skjønne hva som traff dem; den beste lyden fra det velkjente referanseanlegget som de noensinne hadde hørt!

V har en full artikkel om Bertram i denne utgaven av Fidelity. Men for de som allerede er kjent med Bertram-signalen allerede så er det en god idé å lese denne artikkelen for å se om det er noen som kanskje ikke har hørt Bertram-signalen før. Dette er en fantastisk lyd, og den er en av de beste som er blitt hørt i Norge.

**TESPANLETT**  
Hvordan er det? Først og fremst er det en fantastisk lyd, og den er en av de beste som er blitt hørt i Norge.

Jen Dagen er blitt bedre på tidligere utgaver og lyd. Og selvfølgelig, HIGELI gjennomføring og resultat er stort. Og med en fantastisk lyd, er det ingen tvil om at det er en av de beste som er blitt hørt i Norge.

Andre som snakker vi kanskje ikke har hørt, men det er en fantastisk lyd, og den er en av de beste som er blitt hørt i Norge.

Er det en fantastisk lyd, og den er en av de beste som er blitt hørt i Norge.

Bertram signalkabel ble til slutt valgt som "Beste lyd" av 4 erfarne lyttere.

Pris: kr 48.000 for 10m  
Distributør i Sverige og Danmark: Audiorcord  
Forhandler i Norge: High-End



Bertram Proxima Silver signal cable:

## Best sound!

**Within seconds, four experienced listeners had their collective jaws drop, without quite knowing what hit them; the best sound they ever heard from a well known reference stereo.**

There is a feature article on the Bertram cable later on in this issue, so lets give a quick word to our test panel. The Bertram article was already written by the time we did this group test, and I assumed that the speaker cable in this case was even more important for the sound than this one stretch of balanced signal cable.

I therefore feared that the amazing quality I heard with this cable set would not quite shine through in the group test. Not to mention all the complications and general insecurities it would bring both for our readers and us. After all, we stuck our necks out and announced Bertram to be the best cable we had ever heard. And, we had not at all condemned it all to be a sham, despite the extremely high price tag. It was not amalgam, but pure silver for the eye and pure gold for the ears! According to yours truly again, before the merciless blind test...

After putting on the well known Ravel waltz, the previously mentioned four jaws were dropping while double the amount of eyes starred at the editor; what just hit us with that kind of emotion?

**The test panel:**

**Håkon:** Room! Colours! Life! Relatively dark balance of tone due to the cautious area of presence, but marvellous control and lots of room for a panoramic sound where artists and instruments alike can be experienced full on. Absolutely the best so far.

**Jan:** The best so far when it comes to dynamic and three-dimensionality. At the same time, very transparent and absolutely unveiled. Outstanding “purity” of sound and without a lot of the usual sources of disturbance. Everything held in place by exemplary tidiness.

**Anders:** Now we are talking music, not just technique! Romantic and somewhat dark, but detailed and with an incredibly fine-grained and extremely detailed soundscape. Grandiose sound panorama with enormous width, depth and height. I want more and more and more...

**Trond:** What an insight; full panoramic view straight into the music! What a monumental sense of space and what an extreme precision in placing width and depth. And what a dynamic! The music feels amazingly free from noise and physical limitations.

**In the end, 3 out of 4 in the test panel rated Bertram signal cable as “best sound.”**

Dealer in Norway: High-End

Bertram Proxima cables

## **A musical piece of jewellery!**

Text and photo: Knut Vadseth

**Soren Bertram's extreme costly silver cable is the most beautiful one we have ever seen. A jewel! Fortunately, its stunning beauty is not the only positive factor; the sound is just as clean and pretty!**

The world has lost the plot! The few truly rich are constantly getting richer while the many poor are getting poorer. It is really not difficult to understand that many peoples gets gagging sensation when a few meters of wires for a stereo – as is the case for Bertram – comes with a half million NOK price tag for to channels only. For a multi-channel stereo, it would set you back a million!

Even in Norway, a rising number of people have no problems buying stereos in the million NOK price range as long as it feels like good deal. In my world, an expensive stereo is far better idea than having a private jet, a Hummer, or whatever other 4WD that is stifling our air while winning all the traffic accidents.

The reason why Fidelity mentions cables and other equipments in this price range is hardly for the few buyers out there. What is most interesting is finding out how much better – if at all – it is compared to the more normally priced equipment. And, can they teach us something, other than it is better to be young, beautiful and rich as opposed to old, ugly and poor...

### **Win. Win**

If it turns out that these brutally expensive cables are better than others and hence delivers a much grander music experience from you existing stereo, we have to face the fact that our customary cables is a larger musically rattrap than we have suspected. They simply strangle your favourite music! If many of us expose this, it will create a need soon filled by eager companies which will make more money by rationalizing the production, selling at less profit per unit. This as opposed to hand crafting a few with the sky-high production and marketing costs that comes with it. The musical heaven we heard a piece of thanks to Nordost Odin, Jorma and now Bertram, will lie within reach of and even be owned by the masses...

We owe the designers and the rich guys buying these pricy cables a big thank you if it turns out that they are far superior. Because it probably will not be too long before the rest of us can enjoy the same musical heights on a normal budget. In the same way speakers, amplifiers, and not least CD players (in what may be their last days) are really starting to sound EXCEPTIONALY great...

### **A new dimension**

The first jaws to drop did so at an event held by Oslo Hi-Fi Center, where one changed between the well-known Valhalla cables and the new expensive Odin model from the same maker on a Burmester stereo. The latter were unequivocally better, not 3-4 times better like the price would suggest, but significantly more voluptuous and relaxed without loosing its nerve. A heart-rending improvement in every way: heart-rending because so few can afford it – even if they were to sell the car.

Jorma Koski's cables were also "better" on several points compared to Valhalla, but I must admit that I was not al that preoccupied with HOW much better

they were. I rated, arrogantly so, these great cables more of a curiosity in the Scandinavian market based on the price. However, I did gain a new respect for sound quality when I heard the balanced signal cable described further on in this magazine!

First time I laid eyes on the Bertram cable, was at the latest fair in Horten, but I did not get to hear them. Nor did I know the price and was dumbfounded when I found it out from the Norwegian importer High-End. But by then, I had already promised to give them a listen...

I soon got an earnest of what was to come at the high-end fair in Munich, before connecting it to my own reference stereo. In Munich, the distributor for Europe, Audionord, had a stand with Magnepan speakers (which they also distribute). The sound was only so-so using a well-known cable brand. The next day, they had changed to Bertram silver and what a fantastic improvement that was! Off course, it was a lucky match, but hardly just that. Now we could experience a totally new dimension in the way music is presented, just as we would find on our own reference stereo.

But, funnily enough, the “improvement” in Munich had more to do with details and resolution, just about what we would expect from a Valhalla compared to anything else. This is not at all the most typical quality this super cable possesses. On the contrary, almost...

### **More than a pretty face?**

One can more than suspect some complicated ideas from Nordost Valhalla and other well known designs in the construction of this silver cable, with 5 twisted strands, flattened with an extreme surface-to-mass ratio. As with Valhalla, there is mostly air and minimal contact with the isolating material and with a braiding technique we seem to recognize from, for example, Kimber.

Contrary to popular belief, cables are far from “voodoo”, it is predominantly based on several known physical and electrical properties. Yet another reason to wonder why there is so much bickering to do with cables and their significance for your music. The problem with a wire that harbour bigger ambitions than carrying electricity to the light bulb, is getting a stabile mechanical construction that manages to take into consideration some of the most important musical parameters, something that primarily always will be a subjective consideration. Simply an art form!

Bertram’s appearance is also a form of visual art, it be as speaker or signal cables – the construction looks similar. But the sound, as we see it, is quite different from our own reference, which is Valhalla. This despite the first impression from Munich, which indicated something different. Judging by sound, the Bertram cable is a lot more similar to the Supra Sword and its rather dark sound picture that still has room for crisp details in abundance. The problem with a dark soundscape is that many perceives it as “less dissolved” than a lighter sound balance. Even worse, many feels that a dark sound balance strangles the dynamic, a problem I have experienced myself with the moderate priced standard Supra, especially the old kind I used to work with.

### **Music or Hi-fi?**

I quickly have to add that both yours truly and the rest of the Fidelity-gang on the whole agrees that the complete set from Bertram is the “best” we have experienced so far in our own house, though not without controversy on certain important parameters. We still claim that many of the “dodgy” parameter on the Bertram cable is simply due to considerably less shriek and aggravated distortion than we would expect to find. After some initial hesitation, most of us will admit that the

sound is much more reminiscent of live music the way we experience it in a concert hall than what we are used to get from a typical hi-fi stereo.

This is not an unique phenomenon, parts of the same differentiates Valhalla and Odin. We see the same in speakers, which during the last few years have solved part of the problem at the top, with far better treble elements. The typical hi-fi shriek at the top has been noticeably reduced. But, as long as ALL speaker sounds just as bad, we could hardly hear the problem...

It is a bit like trying to fix a wonky table; just as you adjust the length of one of the legs that obviously is too long, you will find that one or more of the other legs also need a bit of adjusting before it stands steady and level. I do believe that a lot of balance technicians do just that, adjust the sound balance to compensate for faulty monitoring equipment, it be from speakers or cables..

This is why we in Fidelity use a wide range of musical genre, recordings, and record brands when we evaluate a product. The record recordings has just as much of an unique personality, especially when it comes to the sound balance, as different rooms and equipment does. Therefore, we mean that a "typical" cross-section of existing records of various qualities is the only sensible basis for evaluating the equipment. Even if several of the records might be "flawed?"

### **The sound of Bertram**

While Valhalla runs deep, but obviously has problems letting enough power through to the famous/notorious mid-bass and thus appear somewhat anaemic, Bertram feels a lot richer in the lower range. This solid musical foundation is a part of the explanation for the Bertram-system being perceived as dark sounding.

Still, the biggest difference is to be found in the upper mid-range, where Bertram's sound balance probably is a little bit more retained. However, I do believe this to be a psycho-acoustic phenomenon because Bertram has less distortion than Valhalla in this range! It has to be emphasized that Valhalla regardless is among the best when it comes to clarity and lack of noise...

But, what will confuse both beginners and the more advanced, is all the usual sound phenomena that is MISSING from the Bertram cable. The fact that so much of the noise we are used to is gone makes you wonder if music information also might be missing. This also affects the dynamic credibility. You can clearly hear that it is not just sound balance that is unusual. There are also dynamic movements that also seem very different from what is custom. Sure there are crisp details with sparkling attack, but at the same time, unexpected caution in other areas. It seems obvious that all this is due to the amazing reduction of noise; hard edges will always be perceived fresher in the attack than a more natural sound of wood, pig guts and resin. All this does demand some getting used to and begs the question: Has the dentist cleaned it a bit it too well?

### **Musical credibility**

The answer is hardly unambiguous. The more you get used to this soundscape, the more it all sounds very musical and credible. This even though it seems that the attack on the piano seem reduced and the presence of the vocalists is a bit distant compared to the orchestral mix. But, this is trivial in compared to the completely unique organic soundscape with a rich and a bit silky smooth acoustic frame surrounding super crisp details. Not to mention the phenomenally large space where you can wander effortlessly between artists, holographically nailed to their right place in the enormous soundscape.

It sounds like typical tube sound (don't yell, I can hear you protesting), even though the reference stereo in this test was transistor based only, including the built-in pre-amplifier in the EMMlabs CD player. The general impression is reminiscent of our grand encounter with the one and a half million Esoteric rig, with its DP A-1 amplifier and B&W 801 speakers. Now we have changed to EC NEMO and Respons Dimension, but still it is the sound of the Bertram cable that elevates the sound the last stretch towards the similar musical Nirvana.

At that time, it was not only the best most of us had heard in our normal surroundings; it was the best many of us had heard ever! And now, here is a couple of cables that drags a different, but equal, stereo towards the same grandiose musical experience.

### **Expensive and discreet**

Using Bertram's silver cables for signals and speakers drastically changed the soundscape in a way one normally would require a significant upgrade of one or several components of an existing stereo system. Even though the sound balance is leaning towards the dark end, and will therefore to most sound less "dissolved", it is obvious that the opposite happens when using the Bertram cable. It becomes surprisingly alive and natural, not only in the usual upper mid-range and the treble range, but also in the upper bass and mid-range. I believe that the feeling of naturalness and presence is mostly due to the extreme speed of the sound passage. Here nothing is lagging.

The bass in general is fuller and gives a more solid foundation for the music than on our Valhalla reference cable, including this sort of "tube sound" that is a tiny bit romantic with a kind of halo around it (some might call it the typical sound of a secondary harmony distortion). It absolutely has weight and firmness at its core. But, first of all, it has more body and resonance in the mid-range that sounds captivatingly organic when it comes to, for example, voices, but at the same time, it still sounds sparkly crisp and detailed in the mid-range and upwards.

Treble is not an issue. We are talking about the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie; it sounds discreetly expensive and not to flashy. There is just about as much class as one would expect; the room lit in an distinguished way using warm incandescent lights as opposed to the green-yellow and sterile neon lights found in cheaper alternatives. An almost golden sound; because of or despite all the silver?

The most striking is still the phenomenal space, a three-dimensionality that, both regarding size and holographic accuracy, is almost ghostly.

### **Conclusion**

The Bertram cables does something to the sound of the stereo that impresses yours truly and each and all in the test panel, in spite of the high price. Everyone also experienced the signal cable as the best in the following group test! Still, we believe that the speaker cable, if possible, is even better compared to its competitors. But, most importantly: After this test, we support the claim that cables are equally important to the other components of a stereo!

Admittedly, in another article in this magazine you will find an example of another neglected component that could turn out to be just as an effective upgrade money-wise, namely the pre-amplifier. But, that does not change the fact that a signal and speaker cable from Bertram can be a sensible upgrade for those with an already top stereo. If you find yours to be a bit light and aggressive, which is typical for many stereos, there is even more to gain!

Yet another advantage of trying to upgrade using cables, is the ease of transport and simplicity of testing with the stereo. But, even with full sellers return (something you should have!), this can still cost you a fortune!

Because perhaps your stereo would be worth it...

Norwegian importer: High End

## Other opinions?

### **Anders Rossnes:**

What a lovely organic sound! And such a pitch-black silence between the transients. At first, Bertram sounds pretty dark, but all the details are there. It lacks nothing. And when the crescendo arrives...

The treble is incredible dissolved, but so golden pure that it can feel a bit reserved. The level also tricks you; you can crank the volume a lot more than usual simply because it never sounds hard and aggressive. It all is totally effortless, with all the distortion problems and annoying noise which one thought was due to the recording, player, amplifier and speakers all of a sudden ELIMINATED; this due to a cable!??? It is also incredible what this cable does to musicality of the stereo. We are no longer talking of a good hi-fi stereo; we are talking of an outstanding music stereo. Extremely expensive of course, but could definitely be worth it to a lot of people.

### **Haakon Rognlien:**

At first you notice the dark sound balance. After that, you get caught up in the tremendous transparency in the soundscape! But, this is not the only contradiction; you will also find a wonderfully relaxed sound that at the same time is engaging, even partly dramatic. And the absolute absence of noise, including noise I thought was due to completely different things than the cable. Finally, the space; it surpasses everything I have ever heard regarding the size and holographic precision achieved only by changing a passive cables.

BUT, there might be some reverberation missing in the presence level due to a somewhat withdrawn mid-range. Undoubtedly an absolutely brilliant cable system. But, whether or not its worth the money, still has me wondering. NO cable can be worth several hundred thousand NOK, can it?

### **Trond Torgesskar:**

Unusually grand soundscape. Unusually clean sound. Unusual lack of traditional hi-fi experience. And, Unusually holographic presentation of the artists; totally liberated from the speakers. However, the sound is a bit dry and withdrawn in the upper mid-range.