

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Tellurium Q Ultra Blue II

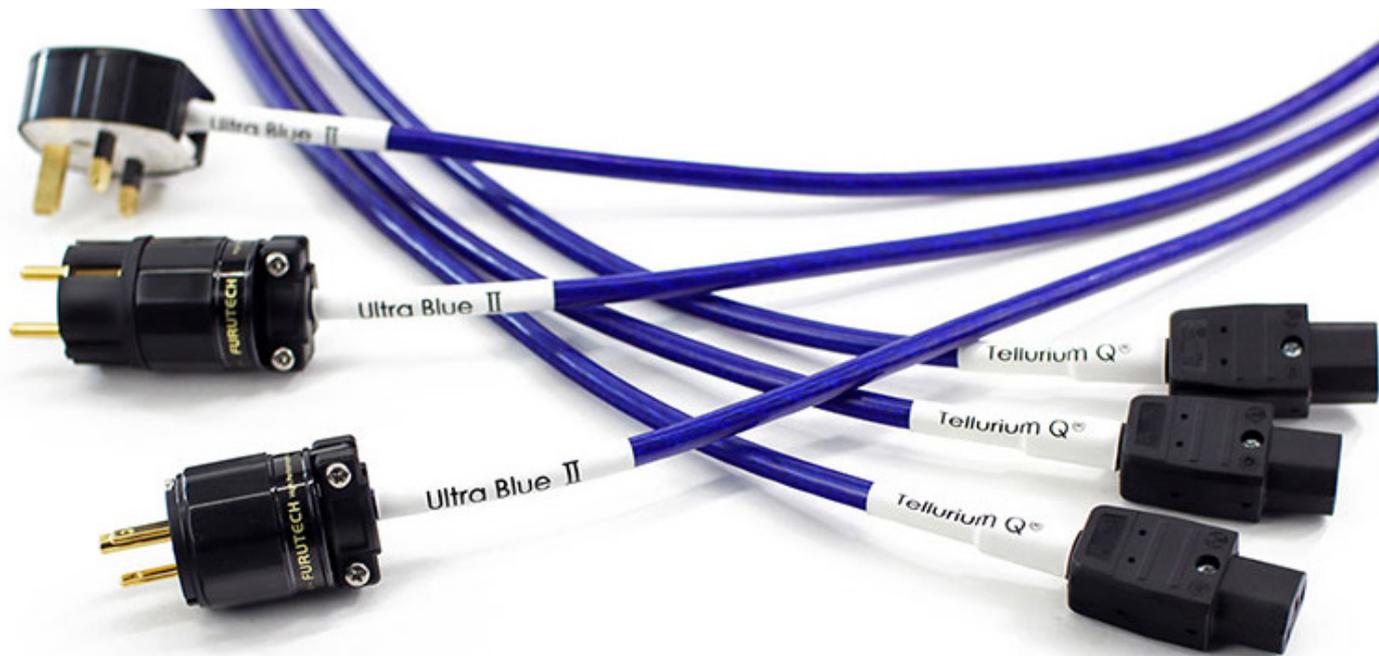
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I have enjoyed reviewing speaker cables and XLR interconnects from Tellurium Q previously for The Ear, so when Geoff Merrigan at Tellurium Q, asked if I would like to compare the new Ultra Blue II mains cable with the original version, how could I resist? Geoff and I had previously talked about his philosophy of product improvement, which can be summarised as: don't release anything unless it genuinely improves on the original. That means a lot of speculative research and development effort, most of which bears no commercial fruit. If ever you wonder why product X or Y costs so much ("I could build something as good for a fraction of the price" is something I often hear) just remember how much time and effort, not to mention money in materials, has been invested before the launch of a new product. It's worth mentioning that Geoff is celebrating ten years of Tellurium Q this year, much of that time was spent researching exactly what matters when it comes to designing audio cables.

Anyhow, enough philosophy. The Ultra Blue mains cables are the entry level models in TQ's range, the Mk II's outer sheath is slightly less shiny and slightly smoother, with similar looking 13 amp and IEC plugs at either end. They are nice and flexible and very easy to fit behind the equipment rack, which is not always the case with power cables. To be truthful, there is little outward sign that this cable will behave differently from the one that arrived in the box with any given component. It has taken me a long time in this hobby to accept that the humble mains lead can really influence the sound of my system. Speaker cables and interconnects make an audible difference, but the last metre of wire from the wall socket to the hi-fi component, really? That started to change for me when I started working in hi-fi retail in 2009 and had the opportunity to experiment with mains cables, conditioners and the like. There are real sonic benefits to be had from what, against the overall cost of a system is relatively modest incremental investment. That is the spirit with which I now review cables and other accessories.

First of all in this instance, I fitted the IEC connector on the original Ultra Blue into the socket in the rear panel of my Yamaha A-S3000 integrated amplifier, with the 13amp plug in a wall socket. The cable it replaced is a relatively inexpensive one from a well-respected American manufacturer and I have been perfectly happy with the performance. Immediately I could hear that the Ultra Blue was letting more of the music shine through, with an added sense of rhythm and timing. My reviews are subjective – I do not have the means to measure what I hear beyond having a properly calibrated dB meter so that I can level match. I left the Ultra Blue in place for five days so that my ears could adjust to the new 'normal', and found it fine with music and with sound from the television.

The last thing I played through this configuration was the Stan Getz Quartet *Live at the Village Gate* CD, a recent release of a 1961 recording, which I shall review separately here in The Ear. Suffice it to say, this is a magnificent recording. Switching to the Ultra Blue II mains cable, I listened again. The noise floor had dropped and the clarity of the sound had improved to a surprising degree. Switching to vinyl, playing Neil Young's *Harvest*, I was totally blown away by the purity of the sound. Everything I played thereafter confirmed those initial impressions. Can mains cables really make a difference? Well yes, they really can. As I only had one of the Ultra Blue II cables on hand I was unable to keep one in the amplifier and then add one to my source, but I am confident that had I done so, I would have heard yet further improvement in sound quality.



As luck and sheer chance would have it, I received another integrated amplifier for review while I was working with the Ultra Blue mains leads. That gave me the chance to do a three way comparison, between the lead packed with the YBA A200 Heritage and the two Tellurium Q Ultra Blues. Once the amplifier had fully warmed up, using the supplied lead, and listening to my usual eclectic and often rather random musical selections on vinyl, SACD, CD and streamed from my UnitiServe or from Tidal, I came to one inescapable conclusion. The Ultra Blue II just made everything sound better and not subtly either. I roped in my long suffering wife to listen too, because as I have said in these pages before she has "good" ears and is totally immune to the allure of new accessories. Her opinion was unequivocal – the Ultra Blue II clarified everything, resolving spoken word and music into a more coherent and digestible form.

All this of course begs the question, if mains cables do make a difference why do the manufacturers of the electronics not include better ones with their products? At least a couple of answers spring to mind. First, economics. They are fighting for your hard earned money and would rather spend it on the contents of the devices rather than the cable. Second, they don't believe that mains cables make a difference. Third, they recognise that we consumers have a bewildering choice and should be free to choose whichever cable suits our budget and our ears. In truth it is probably a combination of all the above.

I had a busy summer reviewing here at Kelly Towers, and waiting in the wings I have more mains cables to consider, from two other highly reputable cable manufacturers, and with models which cost considerably more than the Tellurium Q Ultra Blue II. It is going to be a fascinating few months. But meanwhile, I am happy to report that Geoff Merrigan has once again achieved his primary objective – this Ultra Blue II mains cable does indeed improve upon the original.