

# HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND JANUARY 2008 £3.99 WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK



## ROYAL WYNDSOR

CREEK'S FIRST-EVER DECK JOINS VINYL'S NOBILITY



**WORLD EXCLUSIVE!**

**BETTER HI-FI NOW!**  
INSIDE: BECOME A SET-UP EXPERT

**IN-DEPTH TESTS INSIDE!**



**UNISON RESEARCH** Italian style and 70 watts of great glass power



**EMM LABS** Why it's one of our favourite disc players of the year



**CAIRN** High value hi-fi: clever CD player and digital preamp in one

### ULTIMATE GROUP TEST SPEAKERS

- Amphion Prio 520 • Ascendo Monitor C5 • Dali Mentor 5 • Monopulse 42A • Neat Momentum 3i • Triangle Genese Quartet



### BUYER'S BIBLE

The ultimate hi-fi buyer's guide: all of our favourite gear in one great directory



JANUARY 2008 £3.99

9 770955 111090

01

**Future**  
MEDIA WITH PASSION

# Crystallise

Crystal's versatile Piccolo cable does it all

**PRODUCT** CrystalSpeak and CrystalPower Piccolo

**TYPE** Loudspeaker cable/mains cable

**PRICE** £1,043 (C'Speak, 3m pair), £434 (C'Power, 1.7m)

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.crystalcable.com

Crystal Cable first appeared on these pages with a favourable review for the company's Piccolo interconnect (HFC 294). The Piccolo range also includes a mains cable (CrystalPower) and some speaker cable (CrystalSpeak). All of these leads – along with the iPod cable set – share the same ultra-thin conductors. Although visually reminiscent of DNM cables, Crystal is not a solid-core design and turns out to be nothing like as delicate or as fragile as it looks. We've plugged Piccolo cable sets in and out many times in a single day and they've never shown any signs of wear over an extended period.

There is something charmingly jewel-like about the construction of the Piccolo cables, whose main feature is the use of gold on silver annealed conductors. While the mains cable is a single-piece assembly, with a 13-amp plug and a three-pin IEC socket at the far ends, the speaker cable is different. The main part consists of a length of cable terminated in miniature locking in-line four-pin plugs. Included also are two short sections, with matching four-pin connectors and each cable ending in stacking spades terminals. The test cable was configured for biwire use, but it can grow with your system for full biamplication, or like the mains cable it can be specified with a longer central core section to suit your system. With all the Piccolo product a metal collar not only acts as an identification, it can also be used to unscramble knots in the cable.

## SOUND QUALITY

As suggested above, the various Piccolo cables have a consistent look and feel, as well as a more or less common house sound. The interconnect reviewed previously has a characteristically sharply focused and highly articulate sound. The bass is lean and agile, while tonally, it's surprisingly rich and colourful, though not as warm and as full as many thicker cables. And so it is with CrystalSpeak Piccolo speaker cable too, which has the same lean quality, the same agility and

much the same outstanding detail and resolution. There's nothing overblown about this cable as you will sometimes find with thicker audiophile cables, but there is instead a strong sense of fluency and homogeneity from a cable design that gives the impression of an ultra-fast rise and decay time. It's all about subtlety, about quality rather than quantity.

What we did not expect was to hear anything comparable from CrystalPower Piccolo mains cable, but in the event it turns out to have a similar house sound. It's fast, finely detailed, free of grain and its airy and open. Nevertheless, we worry slightly about this cable. Strictly speaking, we wouldn't want to use a power lead with such a limited cross section for high drain, large current power amplifiers. We'd hesitate to hook up a big Krell, for example. That said, CrystalPower Piccolo appears to be a very good match for quality disc players, notably the Denon DCD-SA1 and Marantz SA7-S1 SACD players that were used for this test. We also found that it did give good results with a medium power, high-resolution, Denon PMA-SA1 integrated amplifier. Once again, the mains lead has the same lean, analytical yet exquisitely subtle quality of the Piccolo interconnect and the speaker cable seems to work particularly well with acoustic instruments and vocals.

The three types of Crystal Piccolo cables we've looked at so far have a consistent sound that works well together in complete systems. Although not as full-blooded as some bigger cables, they major on clarity, agility and fine detail, and it is this consistency and subtlety that carries them along. Our only reservation; the use of a mains cable with such a limited cross section in high current applications. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



## VERDICT - CRYSTALSPEAK

SOUND >> 88%



FEATURES >> 93%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 83%



### CONCLUSION

A chip off the old block for those familiar with Piccolo interconnect, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound.

HI-FI CHOICE  
>> 85%

## VERDICT - CRYSTALPOWER

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 83%



BUILD >> 84%



VALUE >> 82%



### CONCLUSION

Another Piccolo cable with a similar light, agile sound to the audio cables, but the small gauge may not be good for high power components.

HI-FI CHOICE  
>> 83%