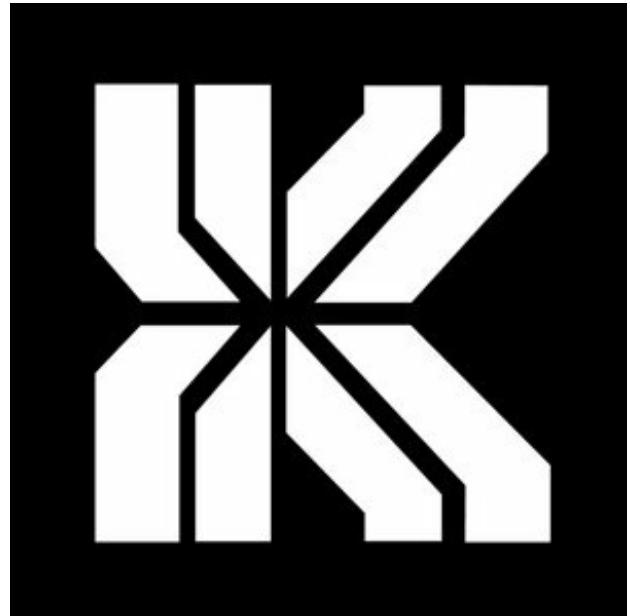


The Kimber Kable MINI BUS Ag - Short Review

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By Ying Kit Lee

Lately I have been reviewing quite a few products relating to a computer and iTunes. This is the current direction in which the avid audiophile is leaning toward. Digital audio is subject to constant change ranging from the evolution from the Compact Disc, Digital Audio Tape, and DVD-Audio. Studio Masters normally relate to 24-bits and 96-KHz sampling in an unbalanced configuration while Studio Reference Masters upgrades the sampling rate to 192-KHz, which presents an exceptionally wide dynamic range of over 160-decibels. Now I am not a recording engineer so I can't really speak about how these numbers reflect the big picture, which is the sonic character.



In the analog world, the quality of the cables used will determine the amount of coloration, current, the sonic impact, and how much additional noise will be brought into the delivered sound. Tapes are convenient but not practical for long term listening as the fidelity is dictated by the quality of the magnetic reading and writing heads. LP or direct recordings are another example of not all needle pickups are the same as each deliver a different impression on how a recording will sound in a given system. This is the most frustrating portion of the World of Audio as we the audiophiles are trying to obtain the most natural representation of the music we are listening to as though we are actually there. Being at the actual listening event over time can cost more than actually purchasing a decent audio system, but that said not all systems are created equally as the differences in cables can change the overall character of the audio presented.



Now entering into the digital era, the purity of the audio is paramount when many of us find this format to be both convenient and highly transportable. This idea is further solidified when the Apple Corporation developed a series of devices which is now called iPods. The iPhone era brought this realization further to reality as music and a phone device is married to form the ultimate in personal entertainment and phone calling flexibility. Audio fidelity though from these i-devices are less than desirable, but that doesn't dissuade those from using these complex devices from audio use. In the digital world, convenience and sound-quality don't necessarily go hand in hand as audio fidelity from these devices are not as important as the transportation of the audio.

*Now many of us transport our laptops from one location to another thus also transporting our music collection from one place to another thus using a good pair of headphones and DAC would probably be the case with a certain group of people. For the sake of this review, I will be using my current mobile audiophile setup by using the **iBasso D7 Sidewinder DAC/Amp**, **Macbook Pro 17-inch 2011 model**, **The Fidelia Player 1.2.1 paired my iTunes Library**, and my **Denon AH-D2000** headphones as the listening point of reference. The digital interconnect used in this review is the **Kimber Kable Mini BUS Ag**. This cable is the upgraded version of the Mini BUS CU, which features silver plated conductors for both power and signal. Now the **Ag** uses the same silver plating for the power, but the signal conductors are pure silver thus changing the overall sonic character of the digital waveform. Now here is where many may begin to debate the fact that a digital cable is a digital cable where the difference in the cable will not change the picture to any degree since it is basically a series of os and 1s. If that were true, then can someone explain as to why there are sonic differences between one cable to another even though it is the transportation of os and 1s.*



To keep the review fair, I purchased my Kimber Kable Mini BUS Ag with the Ferrite Beads since the CU already comes installed with the Ferrite Beads in place. The sonic differences between the CU and Ag are subtle yet noticeable depending on what kind of material is being listened to. Unlike traditional USB cables where the signal and power grounding leads are shared with one conductor, Kimber uses all four pins on the USB specification to fullest thus separating signal and power grounds while using a separate dump and shielding design to further improve data/signal transmission.

*Now listening to music through the CU is quite excellent with very rich, warm overtones while the treble is clearly defined yet smooth in the transition to the mid-range. Music whether it is 160K bitrate Advanced Audio Codec or lossless formats is well defined and heard in a way where the words natural fullness come together thus completing the picture of the avid mobile audiophile. The sound-stage presence is exceptionally three-dimensional with excellent instruments separation and many defining qualities that further define the albums presented. And to make this fair, I selected a choice few lossless albums to test the sonic differences between the Mini BUS CU and Ag cables (both at .5-meter lengths and Ferrite Beads for noise interference reduction). Those albums are "**The Essential James Bond by John Barry - HD-Tracks Red Book CD-A**" and "**The Absolute Sound 2003 - Audio Sampler**" both are in Compact Disc Audio Red Book Standard (16/44.1).*

Since I am using the Denon AH-D2000 to listen to certain differences between the two cables, I can say that this will prove to an interesting test of character between the two different cable designs within the same company. Aside from the Ag using pure silver signal conductors while the CU's silver plated conductors, the cables share some similar compositions. The most visible difference between the two is the more expensive version of the Mini Bus cable uses an electric blue color scheme while the CU is a dark reddish brown appearance. Appearances aside, the Ag is quite interesting in its overall use of materials such as pure silver conductors for the signal path (ground and signal) while the same configuration for power is silver plated over pure copper thus delivering the proper 5VDC and current output. With all these things considered, the proper delivery of both power and signal comes hand in hand as the data

transmission delivery allows for the best amount of sonic detail one can ask for.

*When listening to "**The Essential James Bond**" by John Barry Jr., the CU has a smooth deliver of mid-range and treble while the bass registers are quick and tight in the control area. Now normally when talking about audio, analog cables have that effect with certain musical effects of the audio signal, but in the case of digital it is primarily the flow of electrons. The quality of the conductors used in the creation of the Ag and CU determines how much of the signal is being passed from source to decoder. It is known that Silver conductors have lower impedance values and not as susceptible to RF interference as their copper cousins. I don't have any basis for this as I am not an electrical engineer and I also don't quite understand these terms, but I can say for certain that there is a blind test sound quality difference between the silver plated over copper version (CU) versus the pure silver conductor (Ag). Both deliver a relaxing medley of sonic qualities, but the Ag reveals a bit more in the detailed sound-stage and air whereas the CU delivers a bit of linear tube like quality to the overall spatial image of the music delivered. Since I am listening through the Denon AH-D2000, the level of detail is clearly heard while further providing the level of audio detail that is normally found on exceptionally high-end audiophile system configurations.*



*Migrating to the album "**The Absolute Sound 2003 Audio Sampler**", there are many sonic attributes that allow the listener to feel completely immersed in the music in a way the CU does in a warmer sense, whereas the Ag reveals a bit more in the areas that are normally quiet within the recording stage. Listening to Rosemary Clooney in "Mambo Italiano" is something of a dream come true when listening to either the CU or the Ag. The CU delivers a smooth sound presence with a bit warmth and rich overtones while the Ag has all of the qualities but with a bit more of a airy nature about how the notes are carried. It is a subtle change, but a very welcome and inviting feel to whole situation as it allows for those extended listening sessions to become less veiled especially with headphones that are less than revealing.*

The listening to "Joey" by Dave's True Story, there is a considerable amount of air and additional detail not as apparent with the CU that is clearly defined with the Ag. The singer's voice is clear with a bit more feeling to how she conveys her intentions within the song and the instruments carry a bit more three dimensional feel as though the stage has become more alive rather than just a mere shadow of a dream. A cable is not just a cable given that if the sonic difference, however subtle they are can still deliver a different air and quality to the sound being played, then it is safe to say that a cable isn't just a cable. All those additional audio qualities between the CU and the Ag is well worth the additional \$70.00 over the already \$50.00 for the CU.

Final Thoughts of the hour here remains to the point about the sonic fidelity over cost. The Kimber Kable Mini BUS CU delivers excellent sonic character with many feature attributes to what the Harbeth P3ESR with the Hovland H100, the Mark Levinson No.36, and the Krell KID deliver through what I perceive through the Denon AH-D2000. The Kimber Kable Mini BUS Ag delivers additional sonic character in the form of a wider spatial image while also adding a bit of air to the what is being played as an exceptionally excellent sounding package. The CU represents some of the finest in audio cable engineering while the Ag is the pinnacle of the engineering excellence that is now considered to be a world renowned design.

For those seeking the ultimate in audio fidelity without breaking the bank, then please consider the Kimber Kable USB series as it delivers the best of many worlds without having to incur a considerable cost. Kimber delivers a well designed cable with many sonic qualities that truly defines their cables while keeping the price point within reason. For those seeking a bit more, then the Ag will deliver more for those wanting to get a bit more air in their audio setups.

Some good food for thought. Comments are always welcome.

The Fidelia Player - www.audiofile-engineering.com

Kimber Kable - www.kimber.com

Denon AH-D2000 - www.denon.com

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