

HIJIRI

Strong Japanese leader in power cables

Recently, in the listening room arrived some copies of Combak's new Hijiri power cables. The top of the line Takumi SMT-20 and the Nagomi DCH. Not just your next run-of-the-mill power cord. However, if small specialist Japanese high-end companies are involved in something, you can better take this very seriously.

Almost every country has some form of audio culture. In Europe, many products originate from England, Germany, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries. To a lesser extent, audio also comes

from France, Italy, Greece and a number of former East European countries. The United States plays traditionally an important role. Audio products are also designed and produced in Canada.

However, the most remarkable audio country is Japan. Not only was the world inundated with mass audio products from the 1970s on, but the Japanese are also famous for serious top-quality hi-fi.



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HI-NEXT



KAZUO KIUCHI

Manufacturers such as Sony, Sansui, Pioneer, Accuphase, Luxman, Technics, Yamaha, Nakamichi and Denon built products that met very high quality standards. That does not mean that every product was great, but compare those products with what you are buying now. You have to spend a lot of money these days to match the build quality and durability of many Japanese products from the seventies and eighties. That period was a highlight in history. For many companies, this is a thing of the past or has diminished considerably. The enormous creativity at Sony on the consumer electronics side is far behind us. The time of the press meetings in Berlin, London, Tokyo and other places, where each time you were totally surprised by the sublime new products. Sony is currently still very strong in the professional sector. With a few exceptions, Japan lagged behind in terms of loudspeakers.

In the genes

Japan is not only the country of successful audio companies. Hi-fi seems genetically induced and is an important part of the culture. Known is the Japan Audio Society, founded by Masaru Ibuka (founder of Sony), among others. The aim is to expand the audio culture and create a new society, full of humanity, fun and based on the advancement of technology. The number of hi-fi stores is enormous. In Tokyo you have dozens of mega stores, where you literally can find almost every audio or video product. Amsterdam has only five (?) Hi-fi shops. Many of those Japanese stores also sell vintage equipment. The best hunting ground is Akihabara, but Nakano Broadway and Shinjuku are also favorite locations. The love for vintage is widespread. Nowhere in the world will you find as many audiophiles as in Japan. These are very serious

people who are building amplifiers and loudspeakers, but also share a love for music. There are many shops with parts and kits for self-builders. Dozens of tube amp kits based on, for example, Tamura and Tango transformers and the best capacitors you can imagine. The Japanese are also collectors of vintage audio. Call out Western Electric, McIntosh, JBL, Fisher, Leak, Quad, Acrosound, Tannoy, EMT, Thorens, Bell Sound Labs, General Electric, Electro Voice, Urei, Decca, HMV, Rodine and Garrard and it can be found in Japan. There are audiophiles with complete theater sound systems in the house that come from former American and European cinemas. A large part of the vintage American and European jazz albums are also present in Japan. They have grazed the whole world for all those gems. There are huge quantities of records and CDs for sale and

Japan also produces beautiful reprints on vinyl. A very popular label is King. Known, among other things, for the high-quality and now rare Blue Note reprints. Equipped with a nice obi, you currently pay between 60 and 300 euros for used copies. Anyone taking a trip to Japan can come home with a set of Western Electric 124 or 92B tube amplifiers, beautiful reprints of classic LPs and the original JBL 4350 studio monitors.

Combak Corporation

Kazuo Kiuchi owns Combak Corporation and is well known. Most audiophiles and music enthusiasts know the Harmonix Tuning Devices. The principles of this company are in line with the essence of the high-end principles. Combak Corporation wants to contribute to the reproduction of music with its products, in the most perfect and natural way. They are currently seeing the end user getting removed from that target. Ease of use, streaming audio and all kinds of bells and whistles take the place of authentic, high-quality reproduction that brings out the true nature of music. According to

Kazuo, there are only a few audio magazines and less and less music lovers who support these goals. Combak has definitely a point. Ownership of audio equipment has been democratized and design and production has passed into the hands of investors chasing dollars. Marketing has become an important tool to apply smart funnels and psychological tricks in order to sell cheap and mass produced audio products to consumers. Audio equipment is also often unnecessarily software-driven, with all the disadvantages known very well by IT people. Apps are not only cool but also form a serious security risk and are not necessary for most audio applications. Combak continues to believe in the Compact Disc. Not surprising, because physical media is still very popular in Japan. Physical media brought musicians and artist a decent income for many years. It faded away when streaming took over. The group of privately owned audio manufacturers and music lovers who, from a bit of enthusiasm, goes for absolute sound quality is unfortunately getting smaller. Within a decade the last audiophile is

on display at Ueno Zoo (Tokyo Zoo) and must mate in order to maintain this endangered subspecies.

Cables

In addition to the well-known Harmonix Tuning Devices, Combak is selling a cable line under the name Hijiri for several years. There are analog interlinks, speaker cables, power cords and a digital cable. It took Combak five years to develop that line. Given the background of Combak, the starting points will not come as much of a surprise. The company focuses on an optimal flow of current and voltage, tuning resonances and removing EMC and RFI. Well-designed cables do not produce interference by themselves and also block incoming interference as much as possible. The materials are also important. Copper made to specification is used and the insulation materials are also custom designed. The cables have a cotton-like outer jacket, which of course also requires some caution when working with such a cable. The products are hand-built, which is more or less to be expected from a dedi-





COMBAK IN JAPAN

cated Japanese high-end company. As usual with cables hiding manufacturer-specific secrets, it is not possible to open such a cable without damage. The Nagomi X-DCH therefore has heat-shrink-sealed connectors and the Takumi SMT has black-painted wooden extensions for the WattGate connectors. The cable apparently consists of a larger number of internal conductors that are "wired" in a certain way. That configuration is made in the extra wooden part that is attached to the top of the WattGate connector and hides how the cable is built internally. It is also not entirely impossible to estimate how that cable is constructed. An AI-based computer model that was recently made here for fun, to get a grip on power cables, contains knowledge about the EMI/RFI domain and about materials and constructions. This model provides twelve key construction principles that are related to the performance of power cables. For example, some optimal architectures come out. Combak has opted for one of these construction principles, which can be deduced from measurements on these cables and from the performance. The Substance Plus power cord from Way Cables,

which has been used for comparison, is also built according to this architecture and has sound-technical similarities with the Hijiri cables.

Requirements and wishes

In the listening room are some Takumi SMT cables. That is Hijiri's top model power cord. There are also some Nagomi DCHs. Combak is reluctant in the documentation to provide inside information about these cables. Other brands discuss extensively the structure, the materials used and provide them with photos or drawings. Combak's documentation does not go beyond generalities such as resonance tuning, EMI/RFI protection and that custom made materials have been used. In the listening room, a number of power cables have been built for pleasure based on the developed computer model. Apart from the question marks that the undersigned has about resonances, these experiments show that the performance of power cords in general is partly dependent on materials and the internal architecture. Combak has apparently discovered a number of patterns and it is fair that you do not want to share them with the rest of the

world. On the other hand, the mass audio cable manufacturers are not likely to turn to manual work. That puts enormous pressure on the margin and does not receive approval from the investors. Many cable manufacturers have the products made in China. In general, this does not mean that the quality would be less, but that the cost price is very low and the margins excessively high. The most recent power cable built at the kitchen table and designed using the aforementioned computer model contains nine elementary techniques that all affect the performance of that cable. So you have to ask yourself whether a power cable that is for sale, which has easily removable connectors and is equipped with extensive detailed drawings of the internal construction, will really be that special in terms of performance. Experience shows that manufacturers of power cables who really raise the bar are reluctant to provide information.

Application

The nice thing about power cables is that the performance of such a specific cable is more or less the same in many different sets. The basic characteris-

tics are recognizable. The extent to which they have a slightly more or less effect depends on the system and the entire external EMI/RFI environment. If a power cable provides enormous detail, you will of course not hear this on a system that shows little detail, but on different systems that can display detailed information. Power cables have no direct influence on the sound for the simple reason that the audio signal does not run through those cables. In principle, a power cable contributes to the creation of an environment that is less affected by disturbances. This reduces the so-called noise floor, but also makes it more difficult for interference signals to mix with the audio signal. Tests with power cables show that the often sharp sounding and unnatural reproduction of voices is sometimes in the recording, sometimes resulting from an audio system that does not match at all or from loudspeakers with all kinds of filter and resonance problems. But power cables can especially solve problems located in the EMI and RFI domain with a substantial influence on the sound. What you then perceive psycho acoustically is more detail, more focus, a larger space, more dynamics, a cleaner sound and sometimes a better bass reproduction.

Listening

To get a good picture of the Hijiri cables, listening was done with at least five systems at different locations. The Takumi SMT offers playback of just about the highest level. This cable makes the music sound with a shocking level of detail, but the stage size is also immense. That is also the first

impression if you unsuspectingly put on a piece of music with the cables in the system. As if a curtain is opening, that stage expands far beyond the speakers. The sheer flow and ease of playback are the following striking facts. This cable does not detract from the sublime bass reproduction, the dynamics and the enormous speed of the deployed systems. The voice reproduction alone has a flow, beauty, purity and naturalness that is representative of how voices actually sound. Play, for instance, a recording of Eva Cassidy. Her voice sounds very natural and powerful. By the way, the focus within the stage is first class. At first it is quite surprising that a power cord, being a piece of wire of a little over a meter, can cause that. However, for someone who is familiar with the world of EMI/RFI this is very understandable. A normal power cord and many well-intentioned so-called audiophile power cords cause a huge amount of RFI / EMI trouble. With a power cord that tackles some of those problems elementary, you can solve a lot of problems. However, in order to enjoy what the Takumi SMT does, you have to sacrifice a lot financially. Obviously not canceling your hi-fi magazine's subscription, but the other publications can leave the house. Simply set the thermostat to low, buy a cheaper car, fire the au pair and go through the guest list critically. But, if that doesn't work, Combak also has the Hijiri Nagomi DCH in stock. Based on the same technology, hand-built and equipped with the same WattGates, this cable is more accessible from a financial perspective. Listening to the

Nagomi, it appears that the sound-like character is very similar to that of the Takumi. The same strong features, but all just a little less exuberant. Logical, because you can buy the Nagomi for less than one third of the Takumi's price label. However, that should certainly not be misunderstood. The Takumi is almost at the top of what is possible with power cables. A lot of those cables have been listened to here, but of course not every power cable that has ever been built. Rarely has anything been heard that is just a little better. The Nagomi must therefore be valued in the light of power cables in the same price range. Then this cable will perform well above that level and will turn out surprising in an absolute sense anyway. Keep in mind, but that applies by definition to any power cable, that the result has some dependence on external conditions. Anyone who has a system with components that are very well shielded against EMI and RFI and has a very clean power supply will certainly recognize the qualities of a power cord, but of course to a lesser extent.

Epilogue

The Hijiri cables are the result of Japanese audiophile perfection and handcrafted with sustainable materials and techniques from the EMI/RFI field. Apart from the fact that the Combak Corporation is a commercial company and also just has to earn money, the commitment to maximum sound quality is predominant there. A highlight in a society that nowadays strives for mediocrity, especially in consumer articles and where marketing, a solely commercial drive and investment models are increasingly leading the way. It is not unreasonable to state here that the Hijiri power cords and certainly the Takumi top model are among the best available. The Takumi is convincing in terms of space, a natural flow, detailing, focusing, dynamics and bass reproduction. Hijiri cables belong to consumers who are addicted towards absolute sound quality.

Ruud Jonker

