



Kimber Carbon 18XL

Taking its Carbon range to 'the next level', and celebrating Kimber Kable's 40th anniversary *en route*, the Carbon 18XL is its latest flagship. Review & Lab: **Paul Miller**

Kimber is a stalwart of the cable scene, emerging alongside Monster and AQ in the late '70s

but with its own spin or, more accurately, *twist* on things. The open-weave geometry, variable-diameter copper stranding and Teflon insulation of the now-classic 4TC speaker cable defined not only its lumped parameters but also informed its 'voicing' – a warm but richly detailed sound that won the hearts of many a budding audiophile.

Wind forward 40 years and the new Carbon 18XL flagship is a complex reimagining of this formula. The price, too, is certainly 'next level' at £2870 for a 1m stereo pair up to £6734 for a 4.5m set and £552 per stereo 0.5m thereafter. It's a substantial but flexible cable [see picture], so what's under the jacket?

TWIST AGAIN

The two 14.5 gauge conductors each comprise 21 gently twisted strands (three groups of seven 'Varistrands') held within a conducting, graphite-impregnated polymer sleeve which, in turn, is clamped within a PTFE-like dielectric. This might suffice for the signal and return legs of any other speaker cable, but not Kimber's Carbon 18XL! Woven around these is a series of 16 additional 19.5 gauge conductors, (eight per side) each comprising seven copper Varistrands bound within a similar, but slightly thinner graphite/polymer and PTFE dielectric. The familiar 'Kimber weave' is achieved by supporting this swirl of wires over a soft neoprene core surrounding the centre conductors.



LEFT: Beautifully assembled, Carbon 18XL is terminated with engraved alloy ferrules and a choice of WBT bananas or spade terminations

and, indeed, a few other loudspeakers that crossed our path this month, Kimber's Carbon 18XL proceeded to deliver what can only be described as its 'signature sound'.

This is not 'colour' by another name, but rather an affection for the inherent warmth and robustness of the music at hand. Not all Kimber cables have this quality but the majority that 'hit the mark' do, and it's here in very rude health.

Take Christian McBride's Inside Straight quintet *Live At The Village Vanguard* [Mack Avenue MAC1192] where Warren Wolf dazzles on vibes and the man himself strong-fingers his way through the bass-and-drum closer 'Stick & Move'. There's no dilution of this strength or potency with Carbon 18XL, which keeps similar faith with massed orchestral works as it does with the explosive energy of hard rock. Forty-plus years on, it's a worthy flagship. ☺

Take Christian McBride's Inside Straight quintet *Live At The Village Vanguard* [Mack Avenue MAC1192] where Warren Wolf dazzles on vibes and the man himself strong-fingers his way through the bass-and-drum closer 'Stick & Move'. There's no dilution of this strength or potency with Carbon 18XL, which keeps similar faith with massed orchestral works as it does with the explosive energy of hard rock. Forty-plus years on, it's a worthy flagship. ☺

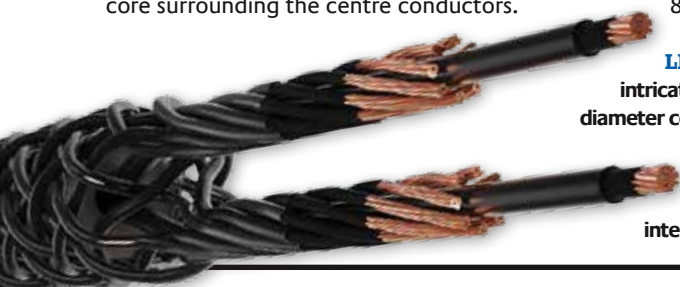
This complex geometry is revealed by the rendering [below] although the finished cable has a woven jacket and a pair of custom, laser-engraved aluminium ferrules to hold everything in place. As standard, the cables are terminated in WBT-0610Cu bananas or WBT-0661Cu/WBT-0681Cu spades at no extra cost.

With a total 8-gauge per side, Carbon 18XL has a very low 5.5mohm/m series resistance, and insignificant power loss over long runs. However, thoughts of the latter need to be tempered against the high parallel capacitance of 428pF/m (or 3nF for the 7m run used here). This is a function of the cable's Litz-like properties and is traded for a very low 0.19µH/m inductance. Not all amplifiers will respond as favourably, so a home demo is a must with Carbon 18XL.

WEAVING A SPELL

Auditioned, as usual, between our Constellation Inspiration monoblock amplifiers [*HFN* Oct '19], B&W 801 D4 speakers [*HFN* Nov '21]

LEFT: Kimber's Carbon 18XL has an intricate construction combining variable-diameter copper strands with fluorocarbon dielectrics, electrostatic graphite/polymer screening plus mutual screening provided by the interwoven signal/return stranding



HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Combining all its topologies into one cable might not necessarily have been a recipe for success, but Kimber has pulled it off with Carbon 18XL. This heavyweight but not inflexible cable is about power and warmth rather than citrus top-end freshness, although its moderate capacitance will no doubt bring a little extra 'zing' to upper mid and treble with some amplifiers. It's a great addition to the pantheon of high-end cables – less 'me too', more 'can do'.

Sound Quality: 88%

