

Scart fest

What difference does improving your cable make? By Michael Wong

Pudney Premium Gold P178 \$59.90 for 2.0m
AudioQuest G-Scart \$150.00 for 2.0m
IXOS XHT801 \$249.90 for 1.5m

It's not too long ago the only Scart cables available were low quality with thin bell wire type conductors and minimal shielding coupled to nasty, loose fitting, tin pressfit connectors. Using these low quality cables was often enough to negate the benefits of using a higher quality video format like RGB.

A few years ago UK company QED introduced their Sgart range, utilising true 75 Ohm silver plated OFC video cable, fully shielded construction and high quality alloy body with gold plated pins. This is true high performance Scart cable, commensurate with it's high-ish price and has previously been reviewed in *AudioEnz*.

Fast forward to 2003 and we now have a much wider range of quality Scart cables to choose from, ranging in price from cheap to serious money.

Local company Pudney & Lee, best known for their low cost audio accessories, has gone upmarket with their Premium Gold Series scart. Finished in dark blue, the Gold has stylish, well fitting alloy plugs.

Pudney & Lee also import the IXOS range of cables from the United Kingdom. The XHT-801 model has a stiff, silver sheathed cable with nicely made but poor fitting alloy plugs. During testing the IXOS lost the picture signal a few times and had to be re-inserted. [Pudney later informed us that this was their demo sample and has been well-used – Editor]

And from – of all places – the USA is the G-Scart from audio cable specialists AudioQuest. The G-Scart is a seriously high end cable with good fitting moulded plugs, gold plated fittings and a striking blue and black woven outer sheath. The G-Scart is an unexpected entry as Scarts are not used on US equipment.

I used the cables for video only with the highest quality RGB-equipped video sources at hand: RGB from my Pace DSR600 Sky Digital decoder and a Marantz DV-6200 DVD player (thanks to Reuben at Image Audio for providing the Marantz). The monitor used is an older, slightly tweaked (colour temperature adjusted, SVM disabled) Sony 34" 4:3 TV/monitor with Scart RGB input. Baseline reference cable was a no-name Scart of the cheap 'n nasty variety.

An easy way to see the improvements when switching to RGB is to use the static menus from either sky or a DVD. Text that is blurry and hard to read with composite becomes a little less fuzzy with S-video and much clearer and legible with RGB. Blacks get blacker without smothering detail and whites whiter with no blooming. Colours appear purer with less noise, pictures sharper with more detail and less interference.

The no-name cable was a bit clearer and sharper via RGB than composite or S-video but overall the picture was still softish, with some colour noise and slight ringing (a hard edge to images like ghosting). Blacks had a tendency to go hazy, crushing out fine shadow detail. White levels seemed a little overblown, also obscuring detail.



The characteristic softness in Sky Digital pictures was reduced but not eliminated. Where the other cables all showed a clear improvement over S-video connection (using Monster M-1000SV), there was only marginal improvement with the no-name cable.

Using either the Pudney or IXOS background haze in the picture disappeared, allowing more detail to come through, while colours were cleaner with reduced noise. Shadow tones in black and white films like *Citizen Kane* and *The Third Man* were still a little murky with the Pudney. The IXOS was a bit clearer but the picture still lacked impact when compared to the AudioQuest.

Where the Pudney and IXOS were pretty well neck and neck, the AudioQuest was in a different performance league. It was like the removal of a veil over the picture. Increased detail, good black and white levels with pristine and noise free colour. With a visually stunning DVD like the Region 3 version of *Hero*, images almost leapt off the screen with vivid colour and a three-dimensionality missing from the other cables.

All the test cables provided a tangible and very worthwhile performance upgrade over the no-name cable.

Given the minimal performance difference between the Pudney and IXOS, the Pudney Premium Gold represents very good value for money. For those with more to spend, the AudioQuest is a superb cable with performance that is well worth the extra money. The IXOS, while a good performer is rather expensive in this company.



Pudney Premium Gold and AudioQuest are recommended scart cables