

SPEAKER CABLE REVIEWS

Driade Flow Reference 808 speakercable



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Review samples supplied by Driade

Retail Prices at the time of review for a stereo pair Driade Flow Reference 808 speaker cable with Flow Copper G banana connectors for all countries, including shipping:

2 meters € 1.500,-

3 meters € 1.600,-

4 meters € 1.700,-

The Flow Reference 808 is Driade's new reference-level speaker cable, intended to inhabit the spot above the Flow 405 in the brand's topmost tier and meant for those who seek the maximum in performance.



In evolutionary development, it's often claimed that new products are a complete redesign. But in the case of the Flow Reference 808, we are truly talking about a huge leap. The Reference 808 is not just an evolution of the 405 but it actually employs radically new ideas. The only aspects of the 405 that remained unchanged are the bananas, the natural silk wrapping, the use of air as dielectric, and the crimping/soldering method. Everything else has been overhauled.



Technology

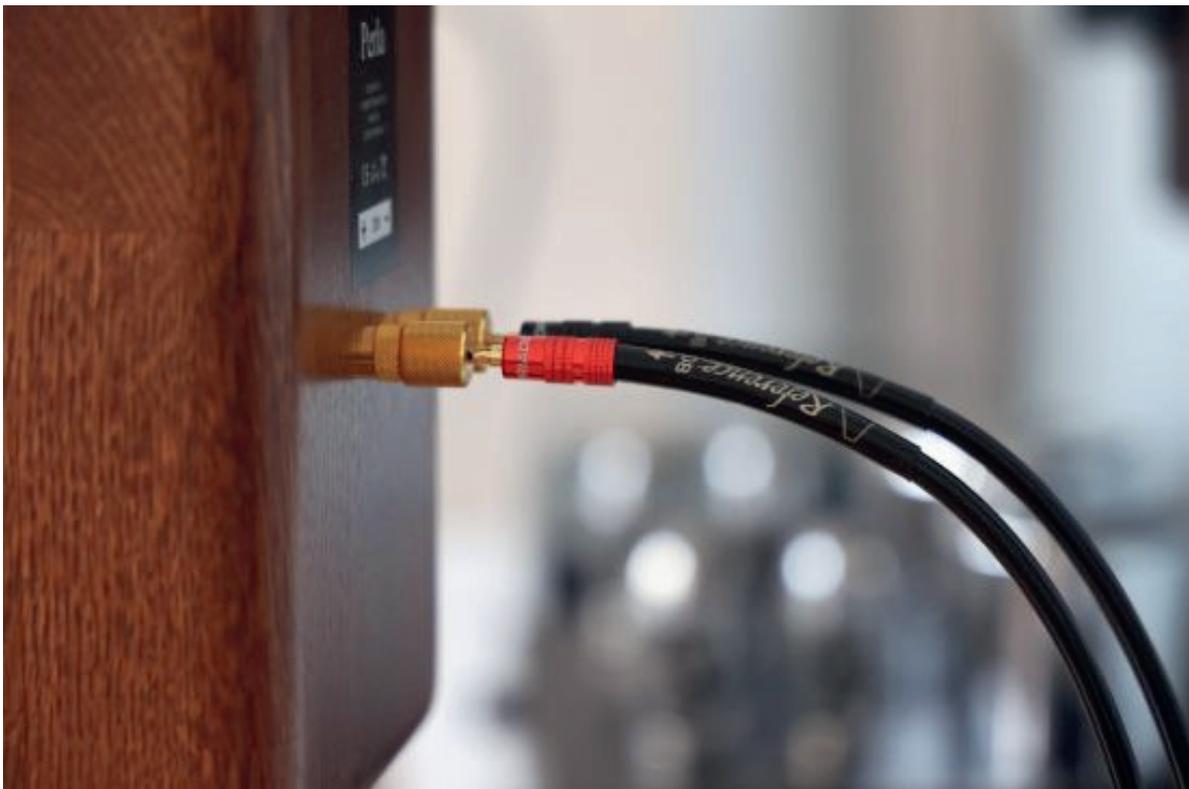
Made up of 800 strands in 8 bundles of 100 in which each of these bundles consists of 4 bundles of 25. All 32 bundles are wrapped around each other in a specific twist. The whole is then wrapped with natural silk so that the special twist of the bundles remains fixed and constant. The design is made such that all individual wires have the same length. To achieve this, a construction computer program has been developed which directly controls the wrapping machine that creates all the bundles. Other key aspects of the design are the use of air as a dielectric and a multilayer outer sheath with a high dielectric value. As Arnold tells me, there's a whole lot more that goes into the design of this cable, but understandably, he can't divulge it all.

The outer sheath is now shiny and smooth instead of matte and rubbery and in spite of containing more copper, actually slightly thinner in diameter than the 405. The cable is still very supple and very easy to use.

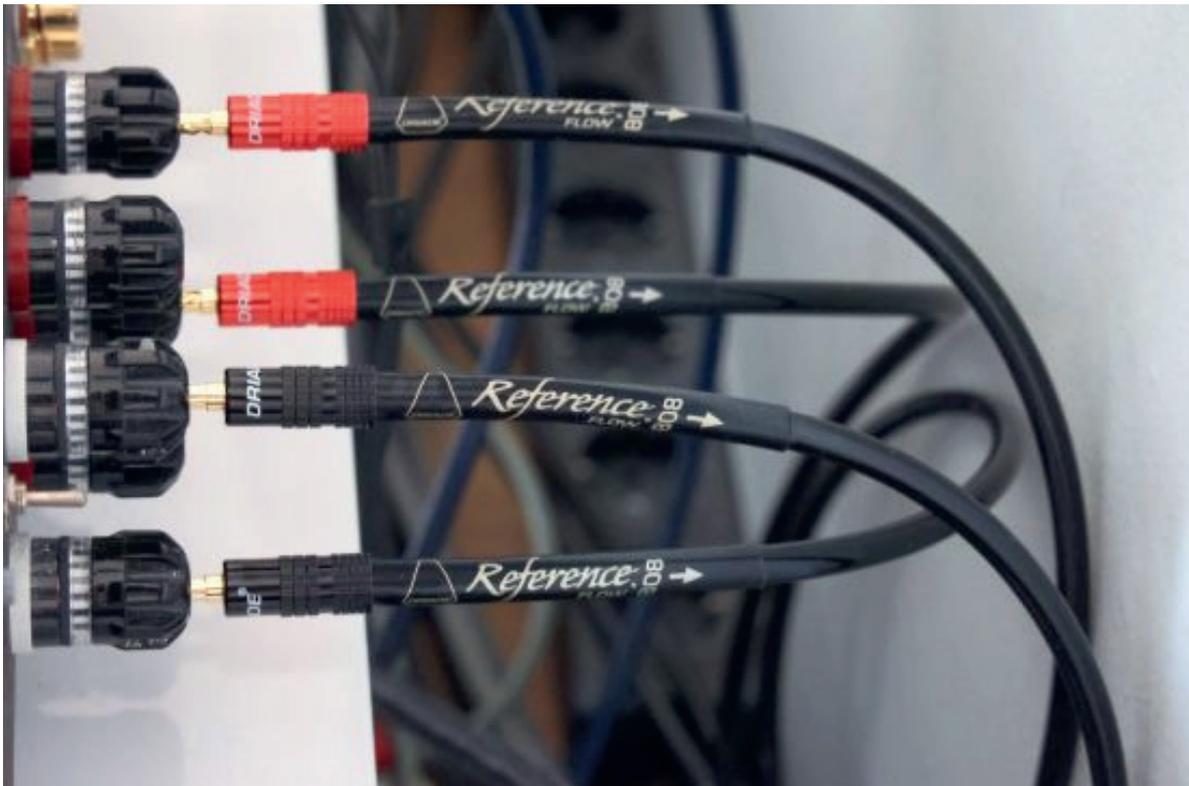


Listening – Ayon system

Let's start with my Ayon tube system in the secondary room. Here, I also used the Flow 405 and it delivered a higher level of delicacy, fuller bass, richer harmonics, and a level of lushness that was highly seductive. But for this system, the 405 sounds just a little too smooth and relaxed.



But with the Flow Reference 808, not only is the sound so much more transparent than ever before, but the bass is also clearer and more articulate, and faster-paced. And arguably the best aspect of this cable is that it is beautifully linear and ruler-flat in its frequency response, yet not bland or over-controlled. Another surprising aspect is just how free-flowing and non-mechanical the cable sounds. This is something in which the Flow 405 also excels, but there, it comes along with a layer of creaminess that is not ideal for every system or personal taste. As I grow older, I find that I lean ever more toward utter neutrality, and this, the new Flow Reference 808 offers in spades, but importantly, along with fabulous liquidity.



Regular readers will probably know of my struggles to find the ideal cable for this seemingly simple system. The strange thing is that this system is forgiving and easy to enjoy, but still ruthlessly revealing of cables that are too far out of its comfort zone. For instance, cables that verge on the analytical side and that work great in the main system, just don't work in this Ayon system. And vice versa, when cables have too much inherent smoothness or warmth, the system's not happy either. But the Flow Reference 808 just effortlessly strikes the perfect balance. It doesn't merely offer a range of tradeoffs but actually offers benchmark-setting precision and transparency, utter neutrality, fantastic articulation, and expression, combined with a free-flowing, non-technical, and fully natural delivery. As I have come to appreciate over the years, this is an incredibly tough feat to accomplish for any cable in any price class.

Its neutral stance means that the Flow Reference 808 is not as creamy rich and velvety as the Flow 405 but that doesn't mean that the Flow Reference 808 is incapable of sounding smooth or rich. It will happily do so, provided that this is in the recording. It simply inhabits a perfectly neutral standpoint and it can swing either way.

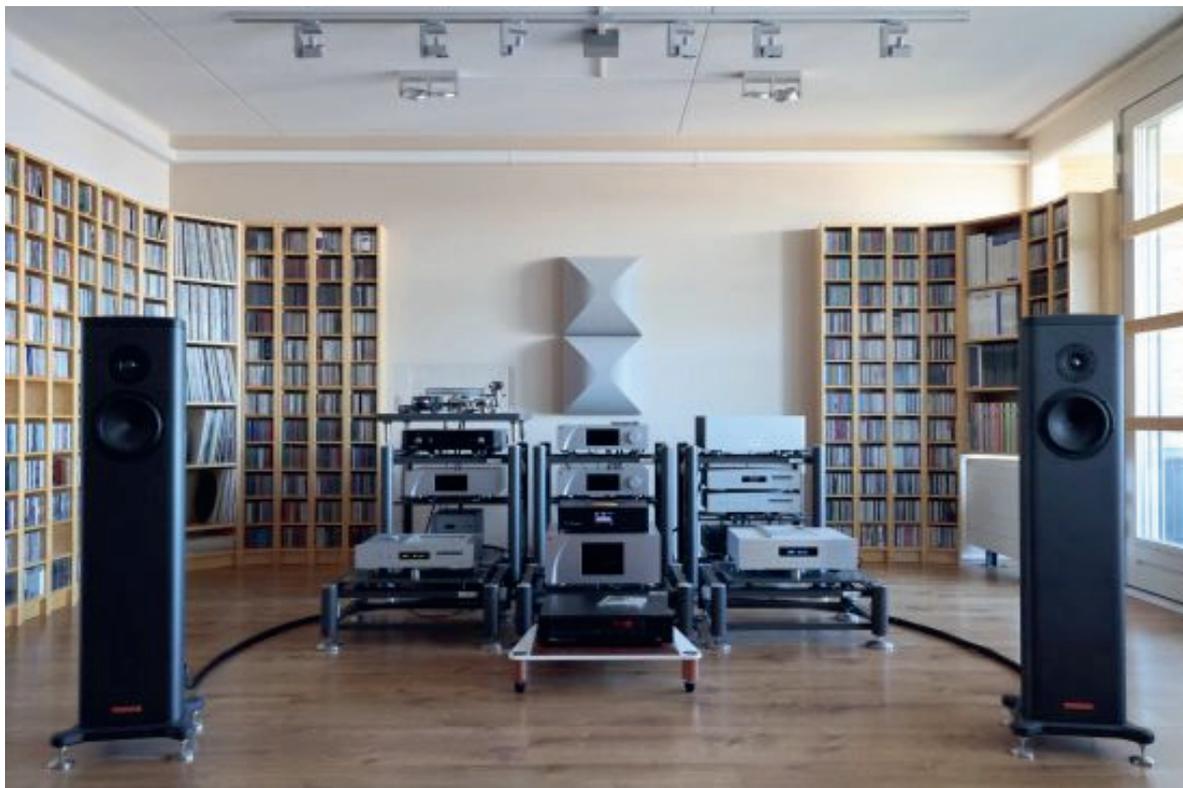
A good way to measure a product's success is the reluctance to remove it. In this case, I am so happy with the cable in this system that it's a done deal: this cable must stay! Honestly, the results are so convincing that I feel as though I'm at the stage where I can sum it up and head straight to the conclusion.

But no matter how nice my secondary system sounds, the acid test is of course in the main system. But before I dive in, let me share a brief overview of my speaker cable history.



Speaker Cable History

Over the years, many speaker cables have come to visit in my main system. In the early years, I started with Transparent Ultra, then Reference, followed by Cardas Golden Cross, Analysis Plus, and some others that always seemed to verge too much to one side or the other. Ultimately, the cable that I stuck with the longest was probably the Transparent Reference XL. I always knew that it did not allow for the most articulate or expressive delivery, but it was quite neutral and very natural, and it seemed to work with a wide range of loudspeakers. During my Apogee times, I experimented with all sorts of cables but still couldn't find the ideal cable. It wasn't until many years later when I heard the Jorma No.3 that I finally felt that I found a cable that did all the good things of the Transparent Ref, in addition to improving on it in key areas that were important for my system, most notably bass control and -articulation, and overall expression. Its successor, the Trinity, provided further improvements in areas where the No.3 was lacking. Although only the brand's entry-level cable, I found the higher-tier cables to sound too rich and voluptuous and the leaner Trinity's balance to be ideal for my system. For several years, and throughout many more speaker changes, it remained my favorite cable. This brings us to the present when the Mad Scientist Black Magic speaker cables took me by surprise by bettering the Jorma's in very nearly all respects. Sure, the arguably rather dry and direct Black Magic will not be ideal for every setup but its utter robustness and huge dynamic expression proved perfect for me.



Listening – CH-Precision System

After the addition of the Black Magic cable in my main system, I was convinced that any other cable would face a tough challenge in bettering the current synergy. After all, while the objective quality of a cable is extremely important, synergy is what ultimately makes or breaks a system.

That said, I have also been so utterly impressed with the Driade Flow Link Reference 808 XLR and RCA interlinks that I ordered 2 pairs and made them my favorite go-to cables for use with review products. The only cables that provide even better performance in my system (and are permanently in use between the CH Precision components) are the AudioQuest Fire RCA's. At more than four times the cost of the Driades, I'd say that's only fair.

Given the above, you'd think I should know better but still, to be perfectly honest, even after the success of the Flow Reference 808 speaker cable in the secondary system, I still did not expect them to be as impressive as they would soon prove to be.



Only mere moments after connecting them, I was perplexed by the utter absence of deleterious effects. Try as I might but I just could not find anything to criticize the 808s. Now, I noticed that not only did the cables not set a foot wrong, but they scored very high marks across the board!



Bass control, tightness, articulation? Check. Speed, agility, attack, expression? Check. Linearity, transparency, low-level resolution? Check, check, and double-check. But the list goes on. The cables are also delightfully delicate, fluid, airy, and highly refined, but without introducing any rounding and with no restraint. Oh, and they are ever so neutral, yet effortlessly natural and decidedly non-mechanic. Just maybe some ears might find them to be on the lean side, but that's because, unlike many other cables, the 808s just don't editorialize the sound in any way. More to the point, they do not enhance the bottom end, they do not add body or "tube"-like richness, nor do they bring any other colorization to the table. Yet, the 808's also have an alluring naturalness about them. They manage to refrain from any influence to the point of being nigh on invisible while letting the music speak for itself. This, to me, is the ultimate goal for any audio cable.

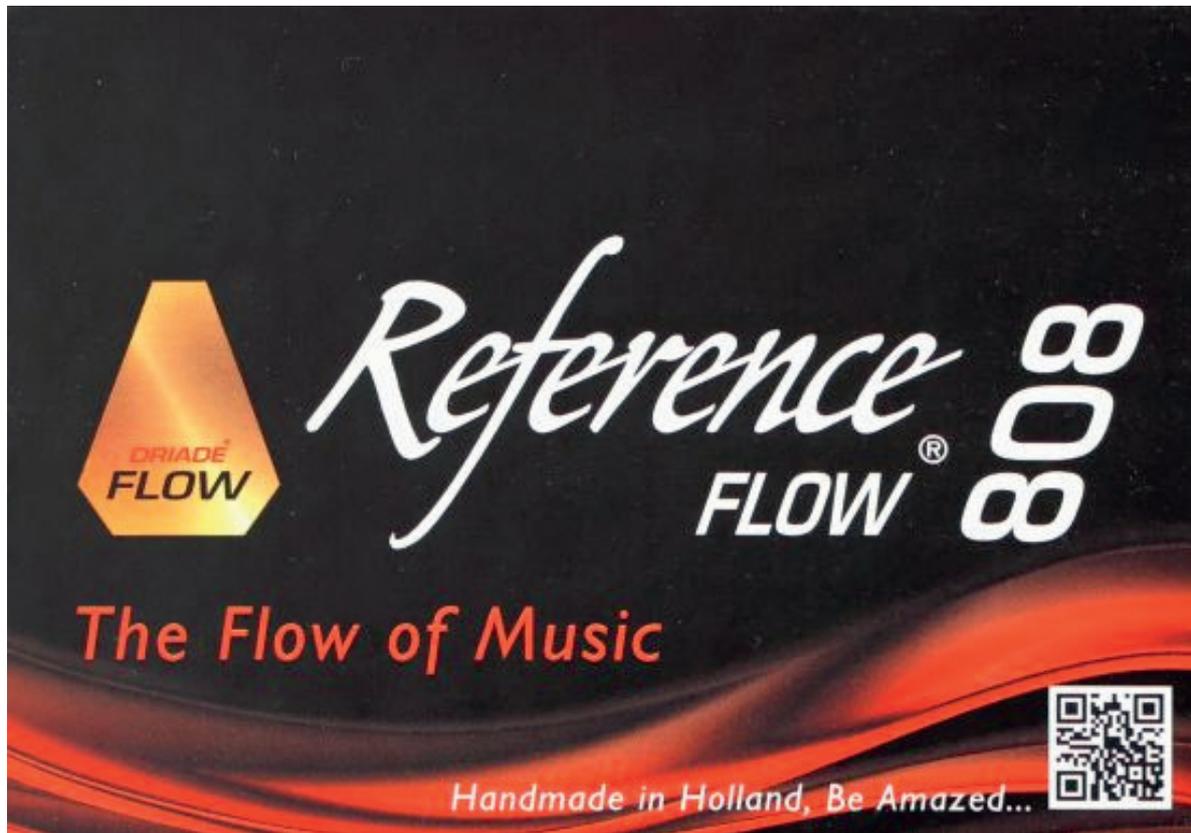


Comparisons

A great reference for resolution and transparency is the FoilFlex speaker cable. Indeed, when compared with the Driade 405, the latter puts in a richer and smoother performance, but it cannot achieve the same levels of detail and openness. The Flow Reference 808, however, can! And it does so while also offering more 3D substance and deeper soundstaging.

Of course, there was no escaping a comparison with my long-standing favorite Jorma Trinity cables. Even after all the above, I was still kind of expecting the Jorma to improve on the Driade in certain areas. But, honestly, I can't say this was the case. What's more, in some of the Jorma's key strong areas, the Driade Flow Reference 808s managed to turn in even better performance. While the Jorma had long been the unbeaten King of bass control and -articulation, the Mad Scientist Black Magic showed it to actually still be slightly round and soft. Subsequently, the Driade simply keeps up with the Black Magic in terms of precision and control, if not with the same amount of relentless force. But it does also offer fantastically refined and airy treble, easily on par with the Jorma.

In conclusion, the Driade Flow Reference 808 has impressed me so deeply that not only will I use it as my favorite cable in the secondary system, but it has also secured a spot just under the twice as costly Black Magic, at the very top of the HFA Awards list.



Conclusion

The new Driade Flow 808 speaker cable has every right to be labeled "Reference". As such, it is meant for those who wish to obtain the most neutral sound with the highest level of resolution and transparency, delicately balanced with airiness, refinement, and fluidity. This cable dots all the audiophile i's, but importantly, it also possesses the kind of free-flowing presentation that makes the music sound like actual music, rather than an electronic representation of it.

Wholeheartedly recommended and a new personal favorite!