

1 AUDIOQUEST OPTILINK-A

£17 (1M)

★★★★☆

AudioQuest makes a habit of producing presentable cables and this Optilink-A is no exception, the black PVC jacket – ooh err, missus – looking smart and providing flexibility when it comes to connecting. Sonically it's less impressive, even considering the meagre price. If you're going to splash out the best part of £20, we'd like a sound with a little more scale and space, and for the bottom end frequencies to be tighter. Lots of style, but lacking substance.

2 ATLAS FIBRE OPTIC

£32 (1M)

★★★★★

The Atlas Fibre Optic is a substantial, solid-feeling cable, which while less malleable than some of its lighter rivals, feels built to last. The precision-polished connections add to the superior feel. Listening to the Blu-ray disc of *S.W.A.T.*, performance is just as good, with it revealing a dynamic sound, with fast, explosive effects alongside authoritative, detailed dialogue. If you balk at spending cash on cables, this is a fine budget choice.

3 TRUE COLOURS INDUSTRIES CORAL

£35 (1M)

★★★★★

This is something of a turn-up for the books – a first *Group Test* win for True Colours Industries. And yes it is that company's cable, despite the lack of any markings or name on the interconnect. This could be the most expensive player of the six here, and we'd still choose this one to recommend – it's comfortably better than most rivals here. Watching *The Spiderwick Chronicles* the cable reveals a detailed, rounded, full and transparent sound. Despite the lightweight styling, this is a heavyweight contender.

4 QED PERFORMANCE OPTICAL

£35 (1M)

★★★★☆

We're monstrous fans of QED cables – we're happy to declare that, after all it's based purely on putting the wires through their paces over the years and finding them to be largely brilliant. This effort feels well made and robust at the same time as being malleable – and purple. Up and running, the cable reveals plenty of detail but it does sound a touch lean, lacking the punch of other leads. Good, but not quite great this time around.

5 ECOSSE FIBRE OPTIC T2T SUPERIOR

£45 (1.5M)

★★★★☆

First impressions are a touch underwhelming, the style seeming a little lacklustre compared to other cables, but it's what's inside that counts. Ecosse deliberately designs rigid fibre optic designs that won't fold more than 30 degrees, believing this to affect transmission speed. That said, the sound we hear once connected lacks a little solidity and punch, sounding too laid-back compared to its rivals. There are more competent digital options here.

6 IXOS XHD508

£50 (1M)

★★★★☆

This is another rigid cable, the body of which feels powerful and durable. On the inside, IXOS claims to be using "medical grade fibre-optic cable", which sounds like the sort of substance you can trust to handle your audio. Still, for all that promise, we're less than inspired. The *Sweeney Todd* soundtrack seems confused when all hell breaks loose, lacking differentiation between sounds. The detail is okay, but the loss of control can't be ignored for this outlay.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

You'll need a decent digital cable to get surround sound signals from source to AV receiver. Here are six of the best optical cables for less than £50...

