

Bound Sound For *S* Report

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DH Labs Red Wave - \$800.00

by Martin G. DeWulf

I have yet to see a product from DH Labs that didn't provide value. Maintaining that value becomes all the more tenuous as the price rises. Correspondingly, a power cord has to be quite the performer to justify an asking price of \$800. That said, I am quite pleased with the performance of the Red Wave Power Cord from DH Labs.

One of the ways by which I assess the performance of a power cord is to substitute the cord in question with one that I am very familiar with. Recently, my foundation reference and benchmark has been the LessLoss Signature (\$1149). If I can substitute another cord for it and come away not disappointed, then the new cord has accomplished something special. And so it was when I pulled the LessLoss cords from the Big Rig and inserted the Red Waves (already broken-in). I prepared myself for a let down of sorts. After all, in recent months substituting anything for the LessLoss has been a let down, sometimes a big one. I put the Red Waves in and let them burn-in for 48 hours. Not knowing what to



expect, I sat down to some musical refreshment a few evenings later and was very pleasantly surprised – the Red Waves in the Big Rig sounded very good, maybe even exceptional; and they continued to improve for quite some time. Once assimilated into the Big Rig, the Red Waves sounded exceptionally clean, and extremely transparent.

The age old debate regarding how a power cord does what it does is always ongoing, but there is no denying the fact that power cords make a difference in how a system sounds. And it's interesting how the improvements wrought by the insertion of a really

good cord are different from the improvements one might hear by going to a better pre-amp or power amp. The improvements brought on by a power cord are distinct unto themselves and are easily discernable from those one might obtain from even a new interconnect or speaker cables. And with power cords, the sonic changes from one to another are oftentimes big – large enough that the question isn't whether or not a change has taken place, but if the change is a good one.

Going to the Red Wave power cords brought changes, but were they good ones? In substituting for the LessLoss Signatures, it has been my experience that you are not likely to get better sound, just different sound. For sure, the Red Waves worked some changes and here they are:

-The Red Wave worked extremely well on the power amplifiers. The Clayton amps loved them for the time that I was able to pair them up. "Fast with body" is the first thing scribbled in my listening notes. I also noted the apparent transparency these cables were able to bring to power amps of all kinds. If your amplifier is more opaque sounding than you would like, or if some power in the bass would be nice combined with some speed and sparkly in the highs, then this cord is exactly what one would want.

It is important to note that the speed and transparency delivered by the Red Wave cord with amps and line level gear is not at the expense of lower midrange warmth and tactile body. **Using this cable in my systems allowed me to observe very dimensional images, and clean backgrounds with lots of actions and energy across the stage.** Yes, the LessLoss did it differently and I'm at a bit of a loss to describe just how they did it differently. Let me try this: While the two cords impacted systems in clearly discernable and distinct ways, it was as if the Red Wave energized the highs and upper midrange a bit more, giving them an almost hyper real effect. The LessLoss is somewhat more relaxed sounding, and for some reason, strikes me as being subtly more textured.

Yes, \$800 is a lot to pay for a power cord, but in this instance, the money appears to be well spent if you have the system to utilize it.

A word on break-in. The Red Wave certainly sounds good right out of the box, but the cable uses **a lot** of silver coated copper (three 10 awg conductors comprised of 1386 individual strands!!), as evidenced by its overall stiffness. It takes a good amount of time to break-in, and without fully allowing the break-in, you won't get the superb results with it that I did. It has been my experience that silver-plated wires or stranding, takes longer to burn-in than non-plated wire – give it a few months. The premium WattGate connectors and double shielding combine to make this a quiet cable, capable of delivering a ton of current instantaneously.