

GutWire Consummate Ground grounding cable

by Alan Sircom



I'm not playing the 'woe is me' card (I get all the toys, all the time), but one of the problems with being a reviewer is your system is in a near constant state of flux. While products that need burning-in or running-in can be divvied out to secondary systems, those products that need to sit in a system for several hours to really come to life often never get the chance to shine. Grounding systems often fall into this category, and sometimes the better the grounding system, the longer the time it takes to get all its ducks in a row.

GutWire's new Consummate Ground – the pinnacle of GutWire's grounding system – is one of those devices that takes surprisingly long to come on song, but it's worth the

effort. With a near continual re-strip of a jobbing reviewer's system, it takes three or four such re-strips to come to life. Fortunately, like many British types, we hit Christmas hard. Activity slows to a crawl mid-December and doesn't really start up again until the New Year. Or, in some cases, June. This gave the Consummate Ground the chance to fully bed-in and make its difference felt.

The Consummate Ground follows broadly along the same lines as many grounding systems, in that a passive filtration box connects to the RCA socket of a device in your audio system. Where Consummate Ground differs from most grounding systems (but follows along the same lines as GutWire's Perfect Ground and Ultimate Ground cables) is that filtration box is periodically desaturated thanks to its connection to a mains/AC socket. This is not an active connection; that desaturation is the Consummate Ground 'draining' to the earth terminal in your socket.

GutWire doesn't disclose the inner workings of its grounding cables, although a combination of Binchotan (a charcoal made from Japanese ubame oak), amethyst and an unnamed rare-earth metal are used in the grounding device itself. The cable itself is pure copper, air insulated with a Mylar metallic

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- ▶ braid shielding and features a noise reducing sleeve. A high-grade Furutech mains plug (FI-1363 in the case of the UK) connects to the wall, while the other end has the option of a RCA connector, XLR, spade lug, banana socket or simple clip.

An important consideration is where to ground the grounding cable. If you have a power conditioner, or especially if you have a regenerator, the best place to use it is ‘not there’. The optimum connection is into the wall itself or, failing that, a simple distribution box connected into the wall with no active filtration, conditioning, surge protection or even other components... apart from more GutWire ground cables. If you use GutWire’s ground cables into a power conditioner, you will not achieve the same performance. Another point to note is the cable is big, and cable management with the Consummate is like wrangling a python (that sounds like a euphemism).

GutWire suggests using its ground wires in a ‘source first’ configuration (as in, start with your primary source, then add further grounding cables to preamp, power amplifiers, and secondary sources until your whole system is suitably grounded). Naturally, you can use the Consummate Ground in combination with GutWire’s other ground cables, but if funds are stretched I’d argue it is better to go for one Consummate and start saving for the next, rather than use several Power Grounds; such is the improvement Consummate brings.

The improvement to the performance of the system is clear from the get-go but seems to be singularly noise-floor related for the first 50 hours or so of music play time. Then, it seems to fill out and continues to improve for quite a few hours after that. Whether this is the ground bedding-in and then going through a saturation-desaturation cycle or just settling in for a long stay is unclear and ultimately immaterial; it does what you want from the outset and gets better from there. After it has reached its peak, however, it maintains that level of performance, so the ground-line desaturation process clearly works.

When it has bedded in, Consummate Ground takes all those familiar aspects of audio performance and hones them. That both is and is not system dependent; a system with the focus on soundstage over dynamic range will not change its emphasis, but both the soundstage will seem more ‘fleshed out’ and the dynamic range broader and instantaneously changing. Similarly, a system that focuses on detail just got a lot more upon which to focus. Tonally, the Consummate Ground is neutral, with just a hint of added body to the upper mids; more flavour than thickening and is entirely sonically benign and positive. Most of all, however, what it does so well is strip back that almost intangible edge, ‘hashy’, near brash sound of digital audio played through some modern amplifiers. It makes the sound seem more ‘organic’ sounding and does this better than the already excellent GutWire ground cables.

I had something of an epiphany during the test of the GutWire Consummate Ground. The effect is important in two ways; yes, it has the aforementioned

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

GutWire Consummate Ground:

£1,300/1.5m

Connectors: Furutech AC plug

(depends on region), choice of RCA, XLR, Spade, ZPlug, or USB

Manufactured by:

GutWire Audio Cables

URL: gutwire.com

Distributed in the UK by:

Epicurean Audio

URL: epicureanaudio.com

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improvements to the overall performance, but perhaps even more importantly, the Consummate Ground gives your system a sense of consistency over time. The hi-fi equivalent of a ‘bad hair day’ is lessened by the Consummate Ground; while this might anger the audio gods and their constant demand for sacrifice, £1,300 is less than a year’s supply of goats to appease them. No system will be ‘on form’ every time you play it; atmospherics, a thicker than normal RF ‘soup’ and more can make even the best systems have an off day, but the GutWire Consummate Ground seems to both reduce the frequency and intensity of those off days, and that consistency is more marked here than many of the Consummate Ground’s peers, even within the GutWire portfolio.

GutWire’s Consummate Ground makes a good system better and keeps it there for longer. Consummate’s only real downside is its addictive properties; after about 50 hours of playing, you will start thinking about adding more Consummate Ground cables throughout your system. On the other hand, taking out of the system is a wrench and your system begins to go back to having a few mood swings. +