

Van den Hul Optocoupler (optical interconnect)



It would be unlike van den Hul to make a completely 'me too' cable, and although there's not much room for manoeuvre with Toslink leads, the Dutch maven has done his best. The Optocoupler has domed ends to the fibre, which according to vdH leads to better focussed light within the fibre and hence less 'modal dispersion' and lower jitter. That appears to make sense: modal dispersion is indeed the bugbear of large-diameter plastic fibres of the type universally used in Toslink leads, and it places limits on data rate and transmission distance. vdH claims that the lead is good for 250Mbit/s, which, in the absence of Toslink transmitters and receivers capable of anything like that rate, we'll have to take on trust for now. Construction is much like other 'upmarket' Toslink leads, with metal-bodied plugs, though these give a particularly tight fit in sockets (perhaps a bit too tight - Toslink sockets are not very robust). 3.5mm 'mini-plugs' are an option.



Sound quality

Of all the optical leads, this seemed the only one that was clearly differentiated from the others. Even so, differences are not vast, but there is a greater amount of detail on offer right across the spectrum, approaching that of some electrical leads. Bass is extended and quite strong, though not quite as tuneful as with electrical connections, and although voices (especially choral) still lack some precision they are better defined and easier to understand than with the other optical leads. Imaging is certainly no worse than with the others, perhaps just a shade better, and climaxes are a touch cleaner, which also makes for a better sense of scale. Overall, there is a greater sense of ease to the sound and any kind of music is easier to follow and to listen to for long periods.

Conclusion

Although it's hard to get wildly enthusiastic about this lead, it does achieve a better performance than competing products. That should make it a good choice for connecting gear that lacks an electrical digital output, and as such it seems appropriate to recommend it.

Ratings:

- ● ● ● ● Build
- ● ● ● ● Sound
- ● ● ● ● Value

Overall rating:

- ● ● ● ●

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