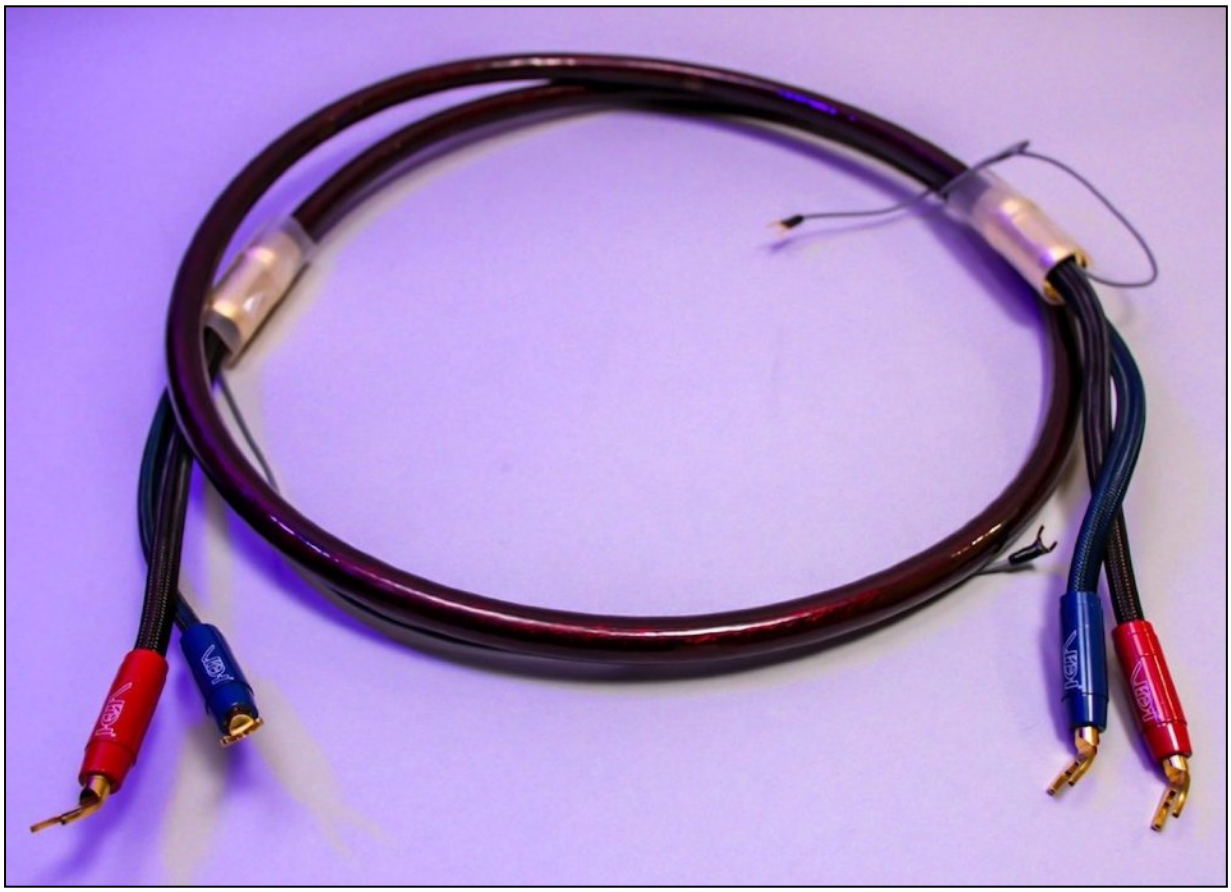
Review of VDH The Nova
by Jaap Veenstra, 04/2023, on :

ALPHA-AUDIO

Van den Hul – The Nova speaker cable

Black Holes &amp Revelations



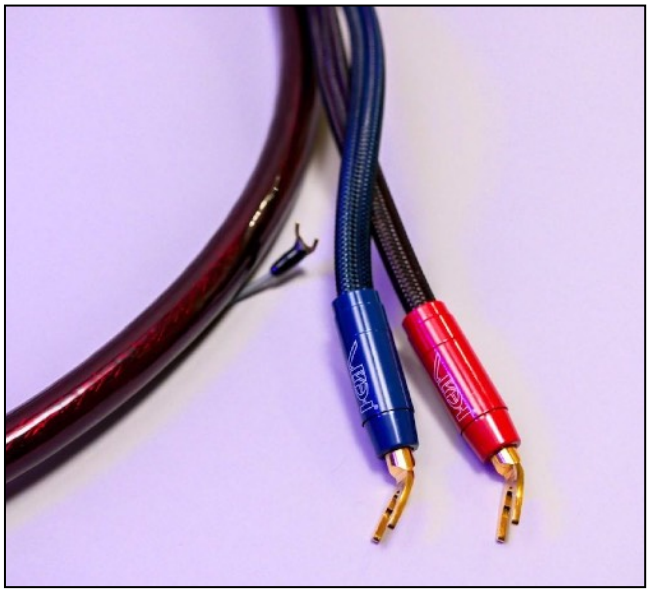
Pros

- Very fast
- Transparent
- Powerful bass

Cons

- Sturdy
- Finish tad old-fashioned

Price: € 3500



Van den Hul needs no introduction. This Dutch brand has been making cables – as well as phono cartridges, pre-amps, etc – for both consumers and manufacturers for decades. If you want more background, we refer you to the presentation at Poulissen. We previously covered a big, fat Van den Hul speaker cable in the mega test. Now it's time for a slightly more expensive model: the Nova. A cable that – according to the website – has extremely low resistance. We'll see!

Extremely low resistance, high conductivity and bandwidth, super shielding. Sounds all very interesting. Whether this is all true, we will see later in the measurements. Although we must confess: Van den Hul does not come across as a manufacturer who claims things they cannot deliver. A.J Van den Hul is a scientist pur-sang and will remain humble rather than sell hot air.

The Van den Hul The Nova (or Van den Hul Nova) is a pretty thick, stiff cable. The stiffness is mainly due to the extremely thick outer jacket and double shielding. The conductors are ultrapure copper with a silver coating. Now Van den Hul pulls the copper very differently than usual. The process is pretty slow and with very little bending. That would cause tiny cracks. The silver is also applied differently. You can see all that in the presentation. There A.J explains it all. The bottom line is that the sound of a cable is determined by the way the conductors are *pulled* and the chemicals used to apply other metals.

Thick!

We all know that 4mm2 is quite a lot for a speaker cable. That's calculable. The Nova offers 16.8mm2 (!) in twin-lead configuration (just single-wire that is). With bi-wire, this thickness halves. After all: the conductors are divided over two binding posts at the speaker. However, 8.4mm2 is also pretty thick. But hey… 16.8mm2 is more impressive ;-).
The thickness of a cable largely determines the conductivity. Thicker copper offers a higher conductance factor. The material also cooperates. Silver conducts better than copper. Then there are the transitions of materials. Poor transitions cause loss. And that in turn manifests itself in a lowering of the conductance factor and thus an increase in resistance. Van den Hul has thought this through and – according to its website – provides very high-quality transitions between the cable and the spades. Banana plugs are also an option.

Ground

What is striking about Van den Hul speaker cables is the ground wire. This is connected to the shield and must be connected to both the amplifier and speaker. This 'grounding' ensures that the EMI / RFI picked up by the shield is neatly dissipated. The Pass Labs X150.8 has a dedicated connection for this ground. Speakers usually don't. At least: our TAD does not have a ground connection. So we left it loose on the speaker side. Some speakers do have a ground connection on the filter. Then you can use this.

The test set-up

We included the Van den Hul Nova in our reference system and compared it to the Driade Flow Reference. The setup of the system:

- TAD Evolution 2 loudspeakers
- Pass Labs XP-12 and X150.8
- Sonnet Pasithea
- Mutec MC3+ reclocker with AAI pucks
- Alpha Audio PC with Jcat USB and Ethernet cards
- Pura Audio Dodo PSU (5V) for the JCat cards
- Grimm TPM cabling
- Driade Flow cabling (speaker / interlinks)
- Isotek filters(Titan / Aquarius)
- YETI Power cables
- Van den Hul Nova speaker cable

The sound

We have played with the Driade Flow and later the Driade Flow Reference for years now. Lovely cables where the Flow and Flow Reference sound very smooth (yes… really!) and the Reference especially adds some low end. There is more body in the mid-bass and low end. This makes it slightly warmer.

Speed

The Van den Hul is different. It all seems a little faster and a little more powerful. Especially in the bass. The kick and punch seems a bit deeper and tighter than with the Driade Flow Reference. This makes it easier to perceive definition in these deep regions. Something the TADs are excellent at, provided everything is right, of course. If an amplifier – or cable – does not have the quality it needs… it quickly becomes a mess.

The midrange also feels different: more direct. More pointed. This is very audible in, for example, Hania Rani (Album Home). The attacks feel tighter and more direct than with the Driade. What is more pleasing is entirely taste. Both cables perform beautifully, but the interpretation is different. The Van den Hul emphasizes the attack and speed in the attack. The Driade presents it a bit more sweetly.

Finally, then the high range. That is an equal story (not very surprising). The Nova is a pretty *airy* cable. So anyone who thinks Van den Hul is dark and slow sounding …. that's pure nonsense. The Nova is the opposite: it's fast and open. In all areas.

Image

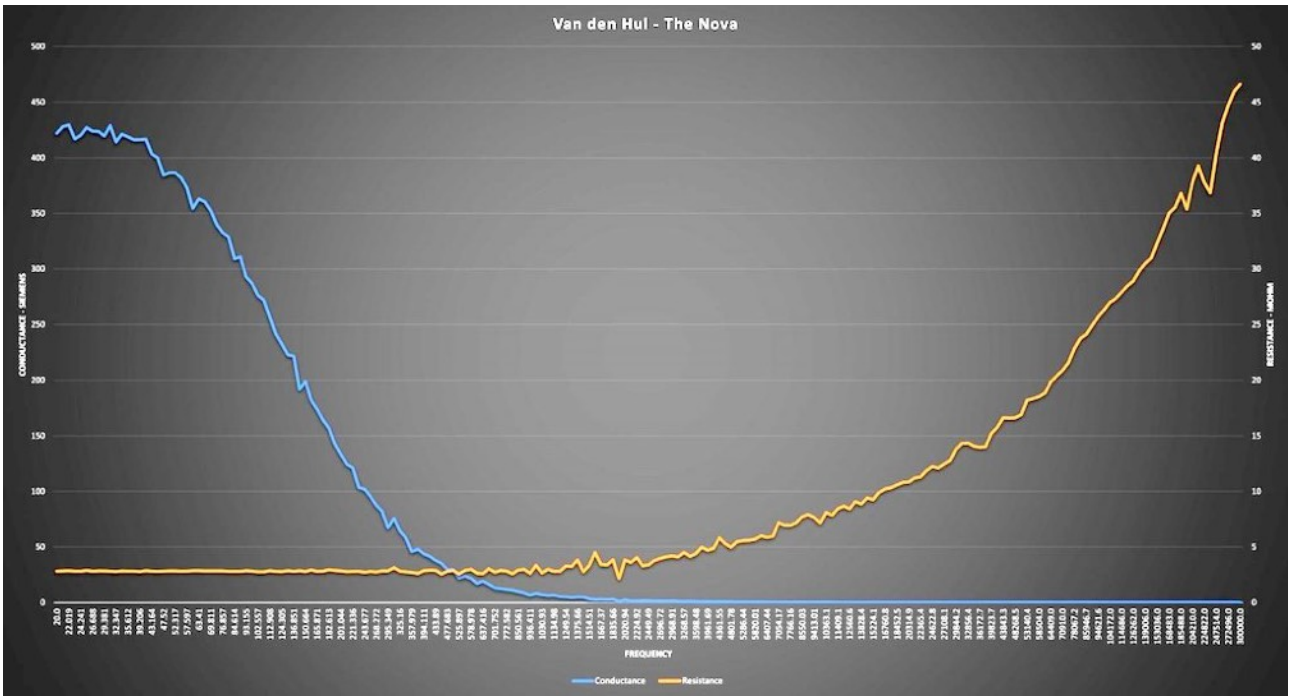
The image is very stable. Effects dance around the room excellently. Now the Driade is already a cable that does this very well; we never felt that the system played ‘closed’ or was restrained. Or could reproduce more space. Now it’s not like the Van den Hul puts down more space either. Both make the speakers disappear completely. However, it is in a different way. It’s incredibly difficult to put into words. The Driade is more like a blanket. It’s cozy, and you feel embraced. The Van den Hul is a bit fresher, more lighthearted and airy. Also when setting ambiance and space.

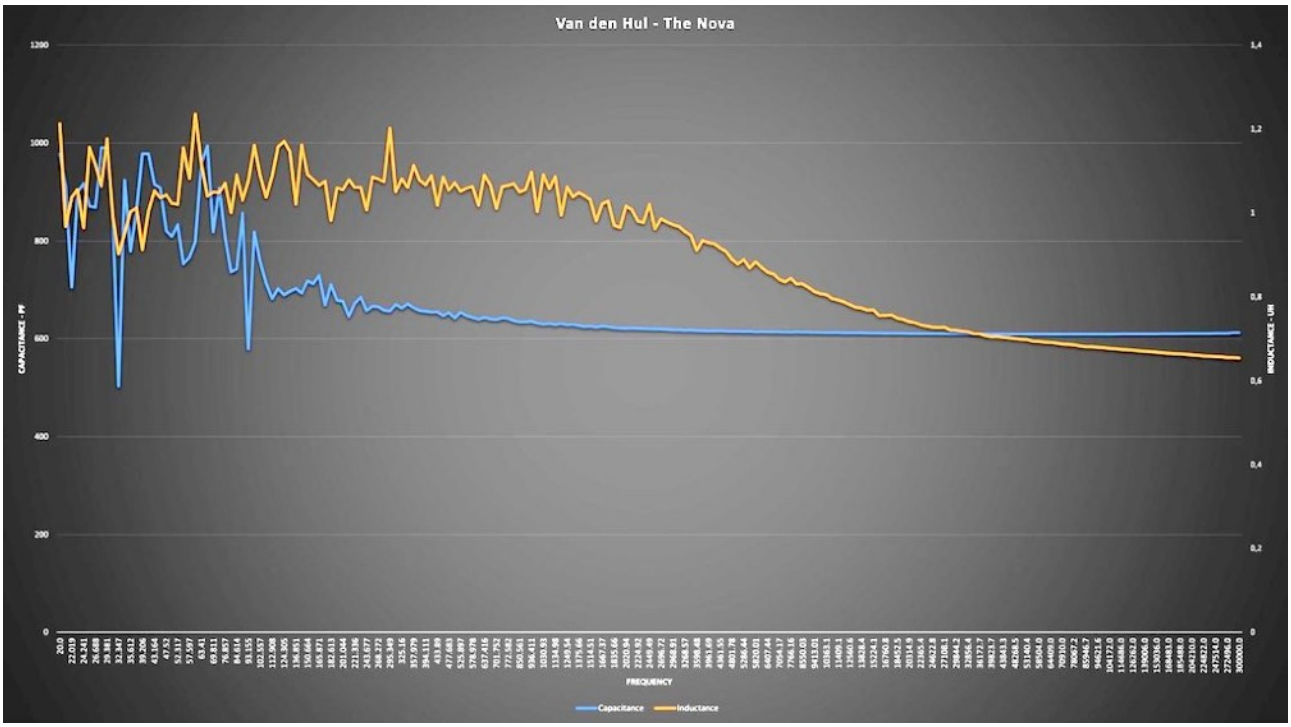
Sample Video

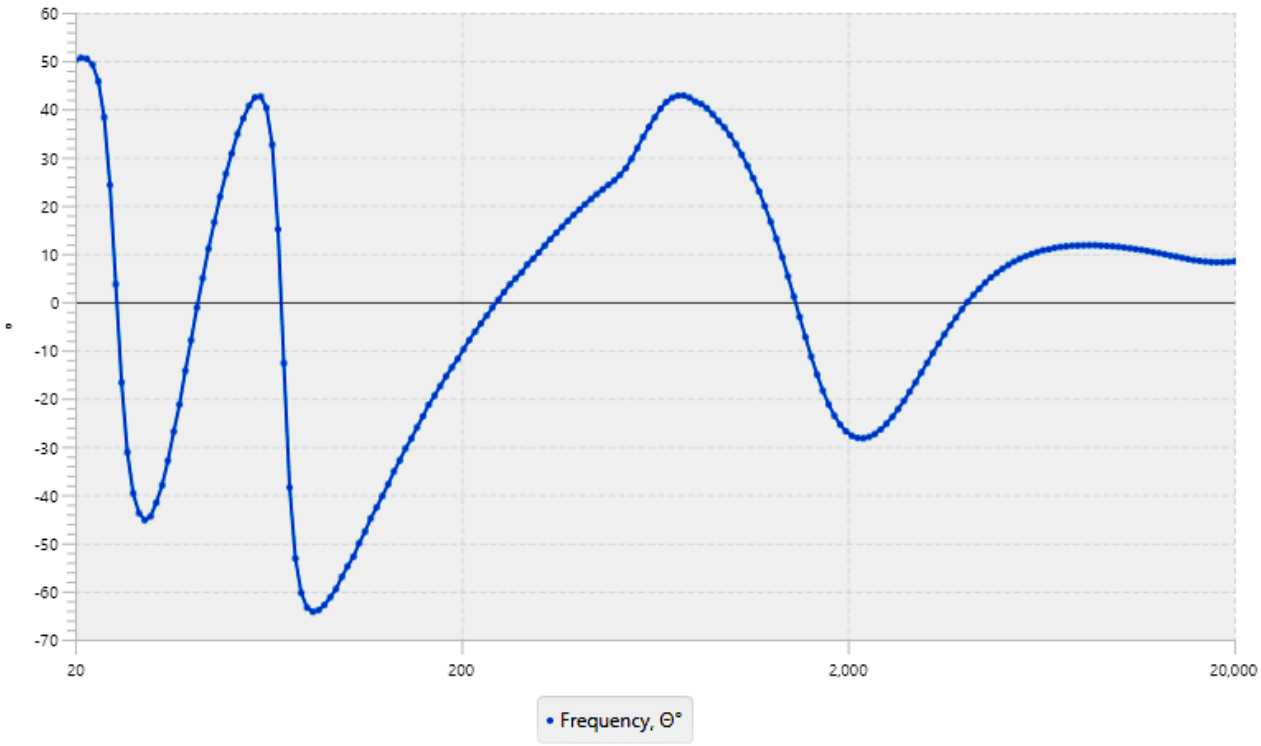
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoJtpPKO9-M&t=49s

Measurements and Conclusion

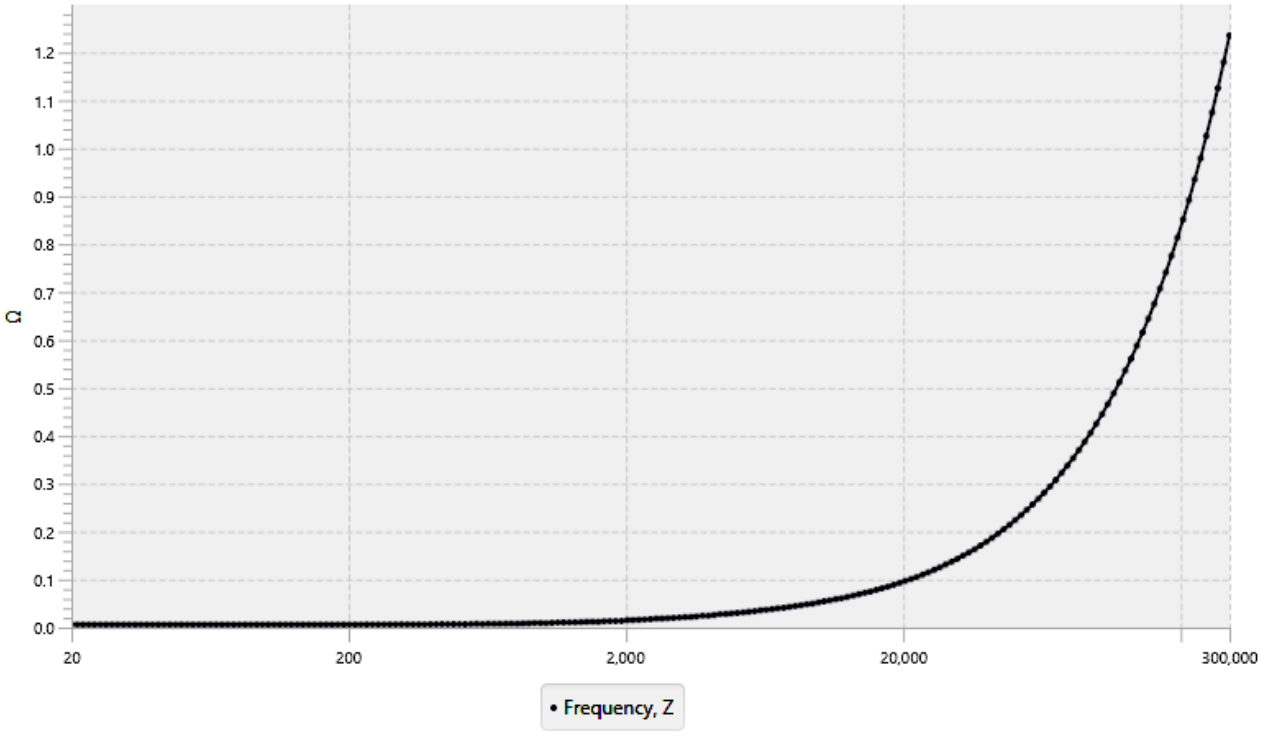
We hooked up the Van den Hul – The Nova to our Sourcetronic LCR to get some insight into its characteristics. We measured Capacitance (open measurement), Inductance (end shorted), Impedance (shorted), Resistance (shorted and point to point) and Conductance (point to point).







VDH The Nova Impédance phase



VDH The Nova Impédance câble complète

What is immediately noticeable is the insanely high conductivity: 425 Siemens is really very high, especially if you consider that this cable is three meters long and that we are measuring the connectors as well. Not entirely surprisingly, the resistance is therefore very low; conductance and resistance go hand in hand. Impedance also remains very low: we just hit 1.2 Ohms at 300 KHz. That's impressive. We have measured cables that go towards 8 Ohm. Many cables reach 3 to 4 Ohms there. In short: this is a very low-resistance cable. And that's good for a speaker cable.

The capacitance of the cable is on the high side if you look at competitors. Inductance is again very low. The question is still: what is better? Too low capacitance can make amplifiers oscillate. Too high inductance gives coloration. It is often a choice that manufacturers have to make. In fact, they are also connected with "ordinary" cables. With non-metallic conductors, it is quite different again. But we'll come back to that another time.

Conclusion

It is a beast of a cable. The Van den Hul The Nova is fast, powerful and open. Whether that's due to its insanely high conductivity - and thus incredibly low resistance - we'll leave for now. We're guessing it is, but it's too early to draw that conclusion. Nor is it necessarily important. What matters to you is the result. And that's all right! If you are looking for speed, tightness, rhythm and precision.... this is your cable.