

Cable Guys

Planet Waves, Evidence Audio, George L's, X-Series, Zaolla, Whirlwind, Core One & Van Damme cables from £9.95

Every electric guitar player needs at least one, but which lead to choose?

Let *Guitarist* be your guide by **Simon Bradley**

There are literally hundreds of brands of guitar cable out there with prices ranging from under a fiver to approaching £50 and beyond, and we would suggest that, for most players, the humble lead is a criminally neglected part of any rig.

Many electrics from the lower end of the market come supplied with that familiar 'bootlace' lead, made from low quality cable and jacks, which can suck tone from your fingers as efficiently as one too many beers; it's also likely to crackle and pop like a couple of bacon

rashers in a frying pan. The first thing you should do with this lead is throw it away, take the plunge, and buy yourself a good one for as much as you can realistically afford: it really could make all the difference.

We've chosen eight cables to dissect here – covering a range of budgets in the process – and we intend to test each to within a millimetre of their plugs. We'll be focusing on the primary issues of their robustness and how well they perform in practice.

Let's get started...

Size matters...

The longer your lead, the weaker and darker your tone and it's all down to capacitance. Back in issue 267 the legendary Pete Cornish explained why this is: "The guitar cable is a small tone circuit. In your guitar there's a tone capacitor that's connected to a variable resistance; the pot. A capacitor has a low impedance at high frequencies, so the higher the frequency the more loading effect you get from the capacitor. Now, all cable has capacitance so the lower that capacitance – the shorter the cable, in other words – the less detrimental effect it will then have on the guitar."

Find an in-depth explanation of capacitance and its specific relevance to guitar cables at <http://www.aqdi.com/cablecap.htm>



Planet Waves PW-CGT-20

£9.95

This 20-footer is a member of the Classic series, the simplest of the three basic types of cables Planet Waves produces, and offers a coaxial cable designed to reduce capacitance. The cable itself, sheathed in standard black vinyl, is just thick enough to ensure that immediate self-coiling is not an issue and we find the slimline look rather appealing.

The nickel-plated plugs are protected by a smart moulded shield and, typical of Planet Waves' innovative nature, include compression springs

around the shaft to ensure as intimate a connection with a guitar's jack as possible. These are rather complicated to describe quickly in print, but take it from us that they work like a charm. The cherry on the cake here is the inclusion of an elastic cable tie, vital if you wish to avoid a spaghetti incident in your gig bag.

Performance-wise there's nothing untoward to report and, at under a tenner, this is a top-value cable.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO SUMMERFIELD **PHONE:** UK 0191 414 9000 **WEB:** WWW.PLANETWAVES.COM

George L's 20-ft

£21.78 as reviewed

George L's cables are well known throughout the guitar-playing world. They allow you to order a cable of an exact length with a choice of jacks and associated sheaths, and it will be priced accordingly: the example here is a 20-foot cable with two gold-plated straight jacks and black sheaths.

The jacks here are solderless, which will certainly polarise opinion, but there's no doubt that they are simple in the extreme to affix to the cable ends: just cut the cable across, push the jack

on and tighten the jack's screw. George L's provides two gauges of cable and we've gone for the thinner of the two just to give you an idea of what's available. Strictly-speaking this 3.9mm option is better suited for patch cables and the like as it can tangle up in longer lengths, but the theory is the same as with the coil-less 6.4mm option.

Good performance; reasonable prices; cool concept.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO GEORGE L'S **PHONE:** UK 01629 825087 **WEB:** WWW.GEORGELS.CO.UK





The rivals

Appetite whetted?
Here's a list of more cables to try:

DIMARZIO

MiRep Distribution
01404 44477
www.dimarzio.com

ERNIE BALL CABLES

Strings & Things
01273 440278
www.ernieball.com

FENDER

Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.com

MONSTER CABLE

www.monstercable.com/
UK

SPECTRAFLEX

www.spectraflex.com

VOVOX

SCV London
0208 418 1470
www.scvlondononline.co.uk

Brands such as Smart, Venom and Piranha are widely available online

Jargon Buster

COAXIAL A cable that includes a single channel or conductor that carries the signal surrounded, after a layer of insulation, by another concentric channel, both running along the same axis. The outer channel serves as a ground.

DIRECTIONALITY All drawn copper wire has a particular molecular structure that can effect the efficiency of the signal transfer depending on which way the cable is used: instrument-to-amp or vice versa. Some manufacturers recommend a direction in which to use their products...

BREAK-IN TIME Science tells us that cables reach their optimum tonal performance after around 40 hours of use. Evidently this is due to dielectric forming of a cable's insulation layer. Don't ask, just do...

TRIBOELECTRIC NOISE Noise generated by movement in the cable's components, resulting in

a static or piezoelectric effect caused, for example, by treading on to the cable itself.

BRAID SHIELDS These shields are ideal for minimising low frequency interference and have lower DC resistance than foil.

CAPACITANCE see **Size matters...** boxout



Evidence Audio The Melody MLSS15 £41.95

There are several candidates for the title of the Rolls-Royce of cables, a number of which feature here, and this work of art from Evidence Audio is pretty close to the top of the heap.

A full list of the detail into which the company goes in the production of a single cable would read like an electronics grad's thesis, but this simple lead includes such wonders as an IGL Spiral Served Shield, foamed polypropylene insulation and carbon skin to reduce triboelectric noise.



Needless to say, each feature is included to improve the overall tonal performance of the cable.

To a certain extent it's true to say that one would require the ears of a bat to hear the difference between cables, but the performance of this cable may well change your opinions. EA suggests a direction in which to use the lead and, expensive though it is, this could be the last cable you ever need to buy: it's that good.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO GUITAR EXPERIENCE **PHONE:** UK 020 8973 1441 **WEB:** WWW.EVIDENCEAUDIO.COM

X-Series cable NWS-20 £16.95

It goes without saying that it's not just nasty electric guitar players that require leads: so do electro-acoustic players. Although this cable is perfectly useable with a solidbody due to its standard coaxial construction, the combination of brown hue and jacks encased in milled wood immediately suggests a more staid intention.

X-Series do propose this cable be used exclusively by electro-acoustic players and although an all-purpose cable (the 20-foot SX20-BL retails at £14.95) is available, we applaud this idea. The cable's outer sheath is made

from a low-friction nylon webbing that positively disallows any sort of tangling, and both jacks are spring-loaded for added security. The final piece of the equation is the inclusion of no less than three Velcro cable ties, seemingly insignificant items that no guitarist can ever have enough of.

The lead performs perfectly acceptably with electro-acoustics of varying quality and there's no reason whatsoever why this shouldn't be part of your set-up.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO EMC **PHONE:** UK 01959 571600 **WEB:** N/A



TIPS

■ When storing cables, never knot them. Invest in some proper ties and gently coil them instead.

■ Take leads out of your guitar by firmly holding the jack, never the cable, and gently pulling.

■ Own a Strat or Tele? Make sure the lead you want actually fits those guitar's unique jack plugs.

■ Don't overlook your patch cables either! Consider custom-length double right-angled jack options.



Whirlwind Leader Elite LE18-1 PRICE: £34.99

Whirlwind's history stretches back well over 20 years. The company is mooted to have been the first American brand to produce a dedicated, high-quality instrument cable: what's certain is that they were pioneers in the use of Belden cable and Switchcraft fittings utilising the diamond-shaped tip that's universal today.

The Leader Elite is a reintroduction of a cable that first appeared in 1990 and boasts a so-called 'toaster cord' braided cloth covering to the whole shebang. The cable itself is Whirlwind's own Accusonic+1 design offering four

layers of shielding around the core, and one of the features of the Elite line is gold-plated versions of the Leader-series plug.

These jacks are protected by substantial yet flexible jackets and, although the cord pattern may not be to everyone's taste, there's never any danger of entanglement. The price does cause something of a sharp intake of breath, but the above average performance means we can just about rationalise it.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO SELECTRON **PHONE:** UK 01634 840500 **WEB:** WWW.WHIRLWINDUSA.COM

Zaolla GR-10

PRICE: £29.64

Returning to the Rolls-Royce analogy we've made elsewhere in this feature, it's this brand that has long been the lead to aspire to and for several reasons. Probably the most pertinent is that Zaolla use not copper but silver as the central channel and, as that metal is a far more efficient conductor, the performance is theoretically improved.

Eight tiers of insulation separate the core from the rigours of the outside world – including layers comprising a foam dielectric insulator, copper braid, lubricated paper and so on, and the

jacks are precision-tooled with gold-plated contacts. You get the feeling that, with all this precious metal around, this is less of a guitar accessory and more of a wedding gift!

Staggeringly the improvement in tone is immediately apparent, offering more of everything across the tonal spectrum, and the price (the 20-foot GR-20 goes for £44.95) is immaterial. You want the best? All things considered, this isn't far off.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO HAND IN HAND **PHONE:** UK 01579 326155 **WEB:** WWW.ZAOLLA.COM

**Van Damme VDMUS004**

PRICE: £39.99

Much as we'd like to report that these cables represent a diversification by the 'Muscles from Brussels' Jean-Claude, any similarity is purely coincidental. These UK-built leads are actually manufactured from cable designed and exclusively used by Van Damme, topped and tailed by either Neutrik or Switchcraft jacks.

Conduction comes from a mixture of O2-less copper and silver-plated copper, the advantages of the latter being increased conductivity and resistance to corrosion, with the central core benefiting from the

insulating nature of good old foamed polyethylene.

The cable itself measures just less than 60mm in diameter and our example offers a right-angled Switchcraft 226 Mono Jack to a Neutrik NP2C straight: naturally any and all combinations are available alongside nine further colours of cable.

There's no doubt that the audio performance of this 16-footer is as good as any other cable here, and its light weight may well appeal to many.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO WESTSIDE **PHONE:** UK 0141 248 4812 **WEB:** WWW.VAN-DAMME.COM

Core One Bullet Cable

PRICE: £34.99

As illustrated by such giants as Hendrix, Santana and May, any seventies player worth their salt 'went curly' at the drop of a hat.

But thanks to the coils being in such proximity to each other, they were very noisy and renowned tone suckers thanks to increased capacitance. However, the Bullet Cable combines that classic coily look with modern techniques to overcome the inherent disadvantages: oxygen-free copper

conductors and jacks plated with 24-carat gold are just two of the features.

At its full extension this example measures a whopping 10 meters and a slight high-end roll-off is undeniably noticeable. This is a weighty lead that, given the wrong circumstances, could pull your amp over, but members of the many old school tribute bands out there need this lead.

Build Quality	★★★★★
In Use	★★★★★
Value For Money	★★★★★

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

KEY INFO SELECTRON **PHONE:** UK 01634 840500 **WEB:** WWW.COREONEPRODUCT.COM

**Verdict**

This round-up is in no way intended to be a definitive list, merely a decent cross section to check out the Rivals box too.

Realistically there are no

downsides to any of the eight, although three – the Zaolla, Evidence Audio and Van Damme – are head and jack plugs above the remainder in both performance and quality.

Of course this is reflected in the relevant prices but, if there's one rule that should be strictly adhered to here, it's that you should buy the most expensive cable you can sensibly afford. It's all about tone at

the end of the day, so don't let a poor-quality cable compromise yours. The best news is that even a pair of the Planet Waves cables, the cheapest here, won't compromise your carefully crafted sound. **GI**