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LUXMAN E-200 W „HI-Fi News”

W majowym wydaniu magazynu „Hi-Fi News” ukazał się obszerny test przedwzmacniacza gramofonowego E-200 firmy Luxman. Podkreślono w nim nienaganną budowę i fantastyczne wyniki pomiarowe tego urządzenia. Czytamy w nim:

Werdykt „Hi-Fi News”:

Pod względem dźwiękowym przedwzmacniacz dostarcza przyjemnie bezpośrednio, bez wyostrzonych krawędzi [...].

Raport z laboratorium:

[...] Luxman oferuje bardzo niski poziom zniekształceń, a do 0,0002 % w całym zakresie „presence”, docierając do niskich 0,002 % przy najwyższej górze. W praktyce to tylko nieco więcej niż jest możliwe do osiągnięcia – nawet najlepsze wkładki MM/MC generują zniekształcenia 1000 razy większe niż Luxman.

Steve Harris, Paul Miller

„Hi-Fi News”

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Dystrybucja w Polsce



Luxman E-200 (£995)

A famous name and unusual features make this transformer-based phono stage look appealing, especially if you regularly use more than one turntable and cartridge
Review: **Steve Harris** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Starting in 1925, the year that broadcasting began in Japan, a small Osaka company moved quickly from selling imported radios to making parts, then complete sets. By the 1960s and 1970s, the Lux Corporation was building Japan's most gorgeous and upmarket hi-fi.

There were some ups and downs after that, but the current Luxman range is keeping the flame alive. If you're seeking a phono stage that can boast traditional quality and a name with a pedigree, you'll be tempted by Luxman's E-200.

This midi-sized unit is a little wider, at 368mm, than the Lux D-N100 CD player and SQ-N100 valve amp [*HFN* May '08] but still quite dinky compared with the company's full-size amplifiers. It doesn't stack with any of the existing models apart from the companion P-200 headphone amplifier. On the front, its main control is a neat rotary switch with three gain (or sensitivity) settings. For moving-coil, the signal is first stepped up by a transformer, and so the load impedance as well as the gain changes when you select the Low or High MC options. Selecting MM sends the signal straight to the active amplifier stage, which also provides RIAA equalisation.

NEW MANAGEMENT

Owned by the founders' family until it was sold to auto sound maker Alpine in 1984, Luxman was bought out again by private investors in 2002. On 25 December, 2009, it was announced that: 'Luxman Corporation (Kazayuki Doi, President) will join the group of affiliates managed by the International Audio Group Ltd that owns numerous high-quality audio brands in Europe... This move will position Luxman to procure funds in a long-term stable manner and to implement proactive marketing strategies in the global market.'



The button nearest to this selects either of two pairs of phono sockets as the active input, without affecting the gain setting. Of the other three buttons, one is for Mono, simply connecting left and right channels together, while Low Cut engages a subsonic ('rumble') filter.

Finally, the Articulator, as seen on Luxman's top model E-1 phono stage, 'is provided to perform the demagnetization function by accustoming the cartridge with sound signal current to be reproduced'. The switch simply short-circuits the input, the suggestion being that playing a few records in this mode will demagnetize an MC cartridge. In practice, most modern MC cartridges have coils wound on non-magnetic formers and won't need any such treatment.

A CONVINCING CRACKLE

With the Moon LP5.3RS and Lehmann Black Cube Decade on hand for comparison, I hooked up the Ortofon Cadenza Blue cartridge. I started with the 'low' MC input setting, which gives a quoted load of 2.5ohm. As the Harry James band swung into 'Corner Pocket' [*The King James Version*, Sheffield Lab LAB-3] there was undeniably a tingling sensation of something happening 'live', a real musical event. However, when the saxes and brass burst out in full-blooded ensemble, there was a slight sense of constriction, a sort of tunnel-y quality. So

ABOVE: You don't get a lot of fancy loading options, but you do get a Mono switch, a sub-bass filter, and the Articulator, said to help demagnetize MC cartridges

I switched to the 'high' MC position. This still gave ample gain, but the loading provided by the transformer winding increased to 40ohm, close enough to Ortofon's recommended 50-200ohm. Now the sound was even livelier: that constriction was all but banished, and the brass had a convincing crackle or edge. The soundstage was big and

well-filled, the horn players more clearly positioned. The bass was pleasingly quick yet well-upholstered in character. On the

'The bass was pleasingly quick yet well-upholstered in character'

free-and-easy blues 'More Splutie Please', you could feel that the band were flying comfortably, happy in the knowledge that they'd nearly got to the end of the whole direct-cut LP side – a kind of loose, anything-could-happen quality.

With Eric Clapton's 'Motherless Children', 461 Ocean Boulevard [RSO 2479 118], the Luxman managed to unleash the sheer wildness of the track, wailing bottleneck supported by a swirling, seemingly anarchic collection of rhythm guitars and keyboard sounds. Clapton's processed vocal was less focused, less intelligible even, than with the Moon, bass notes were less well defined, drums had less bite and detail;

LUXMAN E-200 (£995)

Bearing in mind the price of this MM/MC phono preamp, it's instructive to compare its performance with its peers featured in last month's group test. While the E-200 has the distinction of a transformer-coupled MC input, its technical 'fingerprint' is a mix of the Lehmann Black Cube Decade and Moon's impressive LP 5.3RS. The Luxman offers a wide 87dB A-wtd S/N ratio for its MM input (offering a modest +36dB gain) but a very wide 86dB S/N ratio for its MC stage in 'Low' setting. The relative gain figures are +55.5dB for 'MC High' and +64.5dB for 'MC Low', the latter offering a sensitivity of 598µV (0.6mV) for 1V out and an input overload margin of 5.8mV or +19.7dB. The MM input offers almost exactly the same ~20dB margin, incidentally.

Like the Moon phono stage, Luxman's E-200 offers very low levels of distortion [see Graph 2, below], falling to just 0.0002% through the presence region and hitting a mere 0.002% at the treble extremes. In practice this is little more than specmanship, for even the highest quality MM and MC pick-ups will generate distortion up to 1000x higher than this during playback. Readers might care to glance through their back issues of *HFV* and compare the distortion versus frequency plots for our MC pick-up reviews with Graph 2, below, by way of illustration. Similarly, the E-200's response is very extended from -0.25dB at a subsonic 5Hz through to a mild +0.4dB boost at 20kHz [see Graph 1, below]. Unless you really want to expose your amplifier and/or speakers to warp frequencies, Luxman's subsonic filter [dashed trace, Graph 1] provides a useful -5.9dB/20Hz and -11.3dB/10Hz cut. Readers are invited to view a QC Suite test report for Luxman's E-200 phono preamp by navigating to www.hifinews.co.uk and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM



ABOVE: Luxman provides for two MM or MC pick-ups to be connected at once

even so, this rhythm section seemed rock-solid in intent, glued together on the beat.

Calming things down with *Rickie Lee Jones* [Warner K56628], the sound was pleasant and warm, with a softened character to the string bass, though this still fulfilled its role of propelling the music well. Rickie Lee's voice was not particularly well focused. Meanwhile, the accompanying guitars and keyboards seemed comparatively recessed, in a soundstage that tended to become generalised rather than clear and specific in the placement of instruments.

WITH THE KOETSU

I then moved on to the Koetsu Black. Perversely, perhaps, I tried this on the 'high' MC input position first. And I immediately felt that on this setting the Luxman didn't get the best out of the cartridge, with a relatively flattened stereo image and a seemingly dulled top end. The MC 'low' input proved a much better match, and the cartridge now showed more of its true colours. The imaging opened up, the bass seemed to have more spring in its step. The brass had rather more bite, with a bit more vibrancy to the leader's trumpet solo sound.

With Clapton's 'Motherless', the characteristically gutsy Koetsu sound came into its own. Here the drums had a big impact, with a really foot-tapping offbeat under the maelstrom of guitar sounds, while Carl Radle's bass had a new power and authority. It wasn't accurate, I thought, but it was rock 'n' roll. I felt the same about Radle's simple-but-perfect playing on the next track, as the Koetsu swept me up through Clapton's gossamer 'Give Me Strength'. Here

it seemed that the system was delivering the power and glory, even if it left some of the detail to the devil.

AND THEN THE CORUS

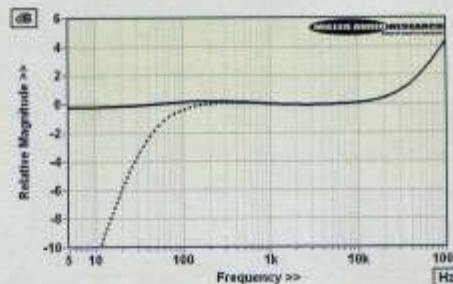
On 'Easy Money' the powerful bass of the Koetsu was an obvious feature. Rickie Lee's vocal was strong and characterful. You couldn't say she was ever in danger of becoming strident, but she was assertive rather than assuring. Once again, the stereo imaging majored on a general feeling of presence rather than pinpoint positioning.

Switching to the Luxman's MM input, I listened to a similar selection of music on the Roksan Corus cartridge. Even to an ear spoiled by moving-coils, this design can sound almost surprisingly spacious and dynamic, and on my Harry James record its virtues were fairly well apparent through the E-200. Generally, it gave a wide and convincing stereo image with attractively clean placement of the horn players, and a smooth overall balance. ☺

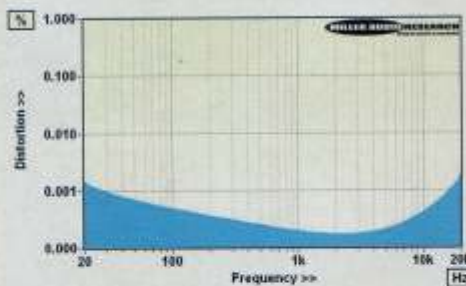
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

You might find the E-200's two inputs useful, though the more usual MC/MM input switch would be just as good for most users. It lacks a big range of adjustments but most MCs will work well enough with one or other of its gain/loading options. Sonically, it gives a pleasing immediacy without rough edges while not quite matching the dynamics, image size and fine detail of some highly-rated models at around this price or a little more.

Sound Quality: 78%



ABOVE: RIAA corrected frequency response from 5Hz-100kHz (dashed line = 'low cut' mode)



ABOVE: Distortion versus frequency is extremely low (MM sensitivity, 47kohm loading), at 1V output

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm/100pF / 4-40ohm
Input sensitivity (MM/MC re. 0dBV)	16.0mV / 0.60-1.68mV
Input overload (MM/MC)	150mV / 5.8mV
Maximum output (re. 1% THD)	9.0V / 310ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 5mV/500µV in)	86.8dB / 86.0dB
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.15dB [-5.9dB] to +0.43dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00017-0.0020%
Power consumption	3W
Dimensions (WHD)	368x84x257mm