

Journeyman Audiophile

by Jeff Dorgay

Luxman D-03X

luxmanamerica.com

\$3,595

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

DSD
Direct Stream Digital

COMPACT DISC PLAYER D-03X

OPERATION 





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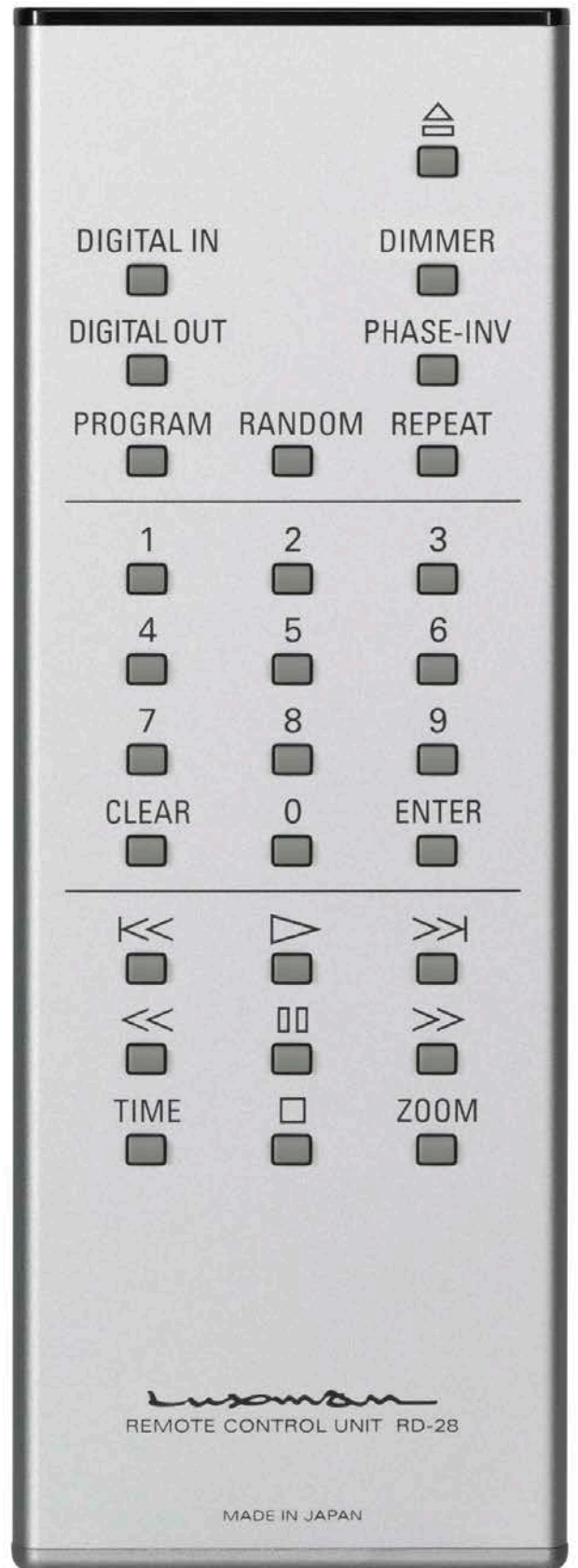
s Geri Soriano-Lightwood's slinky voice fills the room via the Supreme Beings of Leisure's 11i CD, it's tough to take the old-timer hard line that "digital sucks." Far from it, actually. It's hard to believe sometimes, nearly 40 years after the introduction of the compact disc, that digital audio is now a mature technology. Damn, this player sounds good. It's not crazy money, either. \$3,595 will put a D-03x of your very own in your listening room. While some might consider it heresy, but I dare you to find a great analog front end for the same price (we're talking table, cartridge, and phono stage) that sounds anywhere close to this good. And this versatile. Flame retardant clothing donned.

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Visiting all the CDs in the studio, makes for a quickly curated pile of about 30 discs to run this Luxman through its paces with, making for a great few days of listening. Dispensing music via Roon, it's easy to lose track of why the CD format was so much fun in the first place. Enjoyable as it is to have the world at your fingertips, it's equally enjoyable to listen to an album in the order it was intended, from start to finish, without even having to get up to flip the record over.

With so much music available via streaming services, you might pooh-pooh a CD player in the year 2021. Much as we love this aspect of music playback, our readers of all ages have told us repeatedly, that they still enjoy physical media, whether analog or digital. Our more ravenous music collectors know some selections just aren't available via Tidal, Qobuz, or the others. Finally, there's still the immediate satisfaction that comes with putting a disc in the tray and pushing the play button. If you're in that category, I suspect you will really enjoy the D-03x.

Music lovers that want both, can easily stream via the digital inputs, and even take advantage of MQA if you are a Tidal user, or collector of MQA encoded CDs. (A bit of a rarity, but it is out there) The only thing not here is an on-board streamer, however Luxman chooses not to include this in any of their players. With enough reasonably priced streamers on the market these days, this is hardly a deal breaker. If you are not interested in using the ROON ecosphere, there is a Luxman media player included with the D-03x, which will help you play music stored on a NAS.



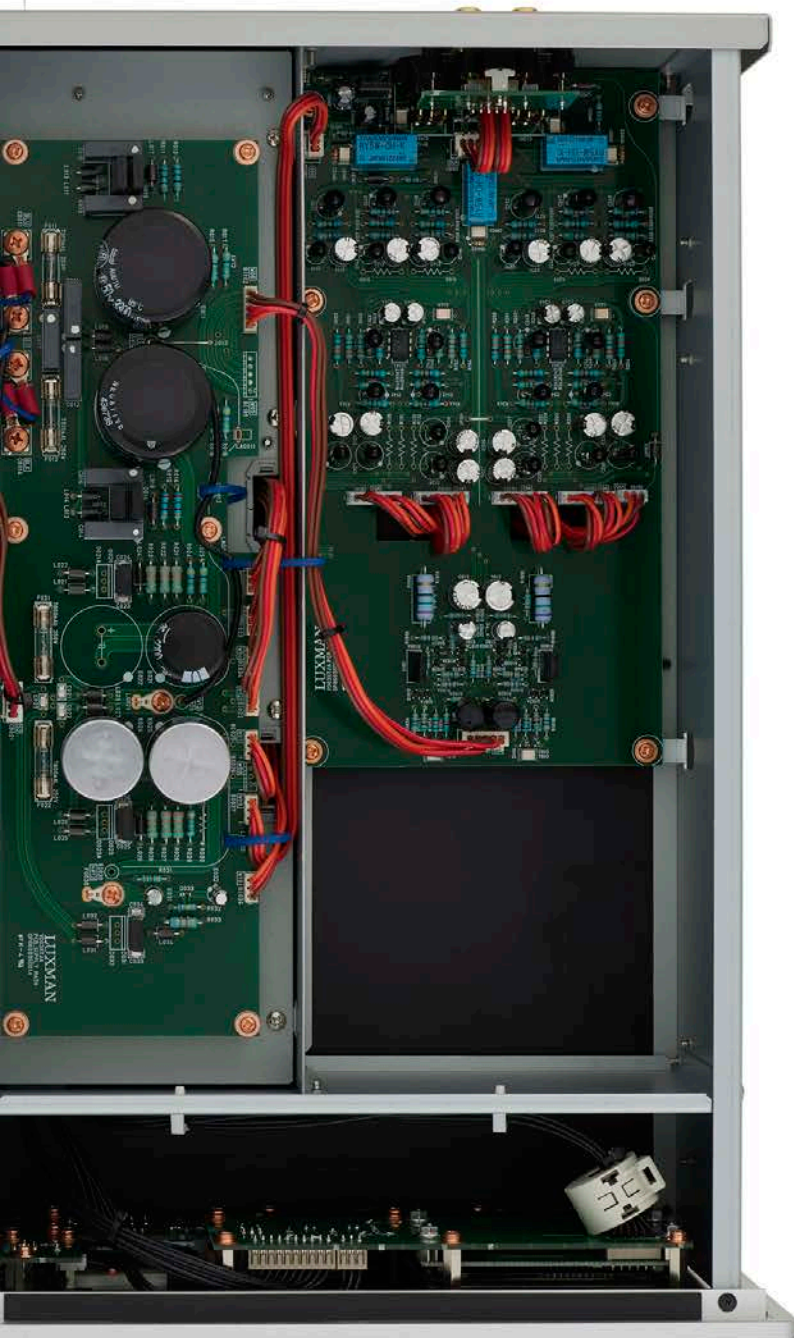
The future is here, and it's good

Ten years ago, a CD player with this level of refinement would have had a 10 or 15-thousand dollar price tag. To sweeten the deal, Luxman's D-03x also serves as a high-resolution DAC, that also offers the ability to unfold MQA files. Add a computer or your favorite streamer, and you have a pretty awesome digital front end. It's hard to believe that this is, for all practical purposes, Luxman's entry level player. True to the Luxman ethos, the D-03x offers the same, luxurious unboxing experience; standard equipment with all Luxman products.

Typical with the Luxman brand, the D-03x offers a solid helping of the fundamentals. Circuit construction along with careful attention to electrical and mechanical details rule the day, yet each model up the range offers a greater degree of refinement and sonic excellence. If you are a major fan of the compact disc, this is a phenomenal player, and considering how many great discs are still available new and in the pre-owned market, this is a great way to roll.

In and around

Once you remove the D-03x from its triple box packaging, you can get down to the business of spinning discs. The front panel of the D-03x is straightforward; standard transport controls, along with a digital input switch and a phase control. The disc tray is silky smooth, with an 8mm thick solid aluminum tray base – no plastic here. Mirroring the color scheme of Luxman electronics, the front panel has an amber readout, offering a magnification mode.



Regardless of user age, this is really handy when trying to read it from way across the room. All functions are available on the Luxman remote, though it might get redundant if you have a Luxman integrated or control amplifier, you'll have two of them on your listening table.

The back panel is equally uncluttered. RCA and balanced XLR analog outputs are available, though they are both fixed level outputs. The D-03x is not meant to be used in place of a preamplifier. RCA/coax and optical SPDIF digital inputs and outputs are on tap, along with a USB digital input. Luxman makes use of a fully balanced line amplifier, and for the bulk of our listening, the balanced outputs were used. It's worth mentioning Luxman's equally exciting L-550AXII integrated amplifier was the partner for most of this listening. Should you be in the market for an entire system, the 550 (priced at \$5,995) is an outstanding mate for the D-03x, and for many, could be a final destination system. Our reference pair of Dynaudio Confidence 20 speakers, with a six pack of REL S/510 subs rounds out a great system with all Luxman electronics.

Nary an out of place bit

Luxman uses a pair of Texas Instruments PCM1795 DAC chips to decode digital signals up to 32-bit/384kHz PCM resolution, and as mentioned, DSD and MQA files will also be decoded. We threw everything but DSD files at the Luxman when using it in DAC mode, as we don't have a ton of DSD files. The few things we did listen to from Nagra's Rene LaFlamme, were all highly satisfying and lifelike.

Moving from budget to more refined digital components, there is a point at which things sound more musical and organic, while feeling less digital, if you will. More often than not, that point was usually in the \$10k players. Today, that level of excellence is right around \$3.5k, and the Luxman D-03x is a perfect example. You don't get everything for \$3.5k – note the lack of SACD playback, and streaming capability.

Rather than be everything to everyone, the D-03x provides great digital file playback and great 16/44-disc playback, with everything in the electronic and mechanical domains executed to perfection.

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Tracking through acoustic, and vocal heavy music clearly illustrates the level of refinement this player offers. Heading back to the violins in The Jung Trio's *Dvorak Trio in F Minor Op. 65* is completely liquid in delivery. The violin is a two-edged audiophile sword in the sense that it can sometimes sound smoother when played back on a vinyl record, because of the LP's inherent smoothness, yet on a less than world-class table, minute speed accuracy can get in the way of the presentation. Yet with digital, the perfect speed accuracy of that medium can be overshadowed by metallic harshness. Fortunately, the D-03x has neither of these problems, presenting a lifelike rendition of the trios' instruments, giving each of them a separate space as well. Ditto for the piano tracks played for the same purpose.

Even something as simple as the opening bongos in Lyle Lovett's "North Dakota" hang in the air as the drum heads are hit, with the initial attack immediately followed by the drum surface springing back. This player is incredibly convincing. The more you listen to it, the more you forget it – as it should be.

The big question is, is it a great \$3,595 CD player that can also be used as a high-res DAC or is it a great DAC that offers CD playback as well. Either way, we are happy to award the D-03x one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2021.

The Luxman D-03x CD player

\$3,595

www.luxmanamerica.com

Peripherals

Amplifiers: Luxman L-550AXII, Conrad-Johnson CAV 45II, Octave V110

Speakers: Dynaudio Confidence 20s w/6-pack of REL S/510 subwoofers

Cable: Cardas Clear

Associated Reviews:

Luxman PD-171 Turntable

Luxman L-550AXII Integrated

The Luxman D-03

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