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Luxman PD-191A

Few brands can match Luxman when it comes to blending traditional engineering values with timeless elegance, and the new PD-191A flagship is an exemplar of the art
 Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

There is a coterie of Japanese brands whose products never fail to delight. Along with Air Tight, Denon, SAEC, Stax and a smattering of other high-end producers, Luxman has provided gem after gem, from valve amps of undeniable desirability to great turntables. Luxman's latest flagship deck, the PD-191A, honours the brand's traditional mix of beguiling sound, superior build quality and stunning looks.

At £11,000, it should be just that: beguiling. In the UK, that price includes the dust cover, an optional extra elsewhere. I don't know how much more they charge, say, the French, but as a UK spokesperson told me, 'UK customers expect a lid'. If you wish to complete the ensemble with Luxman's £2000 LMC-5 MC cartridge then there's a further £500 saving to be had. Our deck was supplied sans pick-up...

OPEN ARMS

Luxman isn't absolutist about these options or, indeed, the rather delightful arm, as the literature shows arm boards for Ikeda, SME, Fidelity Research, SAEC and Ortofon tonearms, a blank for drilling for other mounts, and even a plate for 12in SME arms. I'm not sure how many customers would opt for others, though, as Luxman's new LTA-710 arm – co-developed with SAEC – is a dream to use if, like me, you have no beef with detachable headshells.

This arm is a knife-edge bearing design that looks like a 21st century restyling of EMT/Thorens arms of yore with a cylindrical hub. Its effective length is 10in, and it comes with an overhang gauge that's a doddle to use. You place it over the spindle, pointing toward the pivot point, and a gap in the grid on the gauge shows you where the stylus should be.

Anti-skating and stylus pressure are both of tried-and-tested methods. The former

uses a hanging weight on a nylon thread, the latter is balanced by setting the arm to float. Position the freely rotating scale to 0, and then dial in the tracking force with the counterweight [see PM's Lab Report, p55].

Luxman does not follow current practice by fitting phono sockets at the back of the PD-191A, à la Thorens, Project, etc, because it uses a DIN-type connector directly into the arm base. Cable fetishists could, I suppose, play with other cables, but the other reason is to facilitate third-party arms with their own captive or plug-in cables.

If you're wondering where the rest of the £11k comes in then high mass provides part of the answer. The deck weighs 26.4kg including dust cover, and has a 491x393mm (wd) footprint. The platter alone is 5kg, so Luxman supplies 'keys' that screw in for fitting or removing. Fortunately, the belt goes around the

circumference, so you're spared the trial of fiddling with a belt under the platter – and the usual shower of curses.

SIMPLE SETUP

Protecting the pulley is a plate on four legs that simply presses into place once the belt is fitted. The only other element of setup for the PD-191A is adding the rubber mat and levelling the chassis via its four adjustable feet. AC mains enters via an IEC socket on the back [see p55], another opportunity for cable devotees to experiment. One

might also play around with headshells that use the Ortofon/SME bayonet, but the one Luxman supplies is a fine thing made of aluminium, with OFC wires.

Operation, too, is straightforward, such that seasoned audiophiles will only really need to examine the owner's manual – one of the best I've seen, by the way – for the

'Authenticity of voices is the deck's deal-maker'



RIGHT: Top-down view highlights the rotary and start/stop controls plus SAEC-built tonearm, with vertical knife-edge bearing and detachable alloy headshell. DC motor and PSU are mounted on the turntable's rubber-damped base plate



arm's specifics. A main on/off button at the extreme left provides power, while the larger press button to its right starts and stops the turntable.

Next to it is the rotary, which selects 33, 45 or 78rpm. Then comes a window for viewing the strobe, which is used in conjunction with the three rotary controls to its right to provide fine adjustment for each of the three speeds. The speed accuracy was impressive, confirming PM's observation that the deck provides 'direct-drive standard' low-rate speed stability.

DELUX, MAN!

Any terror associated with setting up high-end turntables has been obviated by the clear, coherent and sensible design of the PD-191A. I had it up and running in 15 minutes, and most of that was dealing with the cartridges, including the aged Tsurugi, Kiseki Blue NS [*HFN* Jul '18] and Koetsu Urushi Vermillion [*HFN* Nov '19] MCs. What all three exhibited via this Luxman deck

was a heightened sense of precision that somehow managed not to strip these cartridges of their inherent warmth.

With the solidity of the deck, the quietness and the speed accuracy, I was predisposed toward expecting reference-grade delivery, but the PD-191A proved even more revealing than anticipated. I will state here that I used it both with and without record clamps or weights: with because I have become conditioned to prefer what they do, and without because Luxman doesn't deem them mandatory – or the deck would come with one of its choice. I mention this because the revelatory nature of the PD-191A allows you to hear the differences in clamps and pucks, should you be sceptical about them.

GOOD COMPANY

What I was overjoyed to hear were the results of an unintended experiment. Armed with a selection of the Atlantic 75 reissues on clear vinyl, I enjoyed long

ABOVE: With its 15mm-thick alloy top plate and rosewood-stained panel, the PD-191A is traditionally elegant. Fine speed adjustment for 33.3, 45 or 78rpm is offered alongside a lens onto an illuminated strobe

sessions with the new clear pressing of Bad Company's eponymous debut album [Swan Song RCV1 8410]. Despite exuding refinement, the PD-191A elicited irresistible air-guitar playing from the opening notes of 'Can't Get Enough'.

As is mandatory with hard rock of this calibre, the sound had exactly the levels of 'weight' that define both heavy metal music and a heavy-plinth turntable. The solidity, especially in the bass guitar, also reinforced the lower octaves of each cartridge, at times even approaching the reach of mid-level DS Audio optical models – the champions in this area. The power chords also possessed precisely the force this material demands.

BACK IN BLACK

Where it became interesting was in comparing two pressing types, which I had never actually bothered to do before. Such was the openness, transparency and detail retrieval afforded by this flagship Luxman deck that I figured I would compare the new, clear pressing with my black vinyl originals. The validity of this test is questionable as I am sure the new release has been remastered, while the original came from younger master tapes.

Still, what intrigued me was a question that some hardcore vinyl addicts love to debate: is black vinyl better than clear, as its carbon component serves as a lubricant, even though transparent vinyl is the material's natural state? I had three black vinyl versions of *Swan Song* dating back to 1974 as well as the new pressing, and while I couldn't arrive at an answer to the

LUXMAN'S LIBERATION

You can count on two hands the hi-fi brands that can mark a century, and Luxman's 100th anniversary takes place in 2025. Founded as the Lux Corporation in June 1925 by T. Hayakawa and his brother, it began as the radio department of Kinsuido Picture Frame Store in Osaka. The brothers had the foresight to import radios in time for Japan's first broadcast later that year in what was a frenetic period – NHK (Japan's answer to the BBC) was only established in November 1924. Wishing to avoid a dependency on importing hardware from the USA and Europe, Lux swiftly moved into manufacturing, selling under the Luxman name and gaining a reputation for superior transformers and switches – both hallmarks of every Luxman product to this day.

Luxman became one of Japan's first high-end brands during the 1960s with the explosive growth of separates-based hi-fi. Among its firsts were a vacuum hold-down turntable, the PD-300 [*HFN* Jul '81], while also employing the legendary Tim de Paravicini for its amplifier designs. After a fallow period under Alpine, IAG acquired Luxman in 2009, joining the equally venerable Quad and Wharfedale. Maintaining its high-end status, Luxman is kept separate from the other IAG brands and remains based in Kanagawa, Japan.

TURNTABLE



ABOVE: The four heavy-duty insulating feet are clearly visible here, each offering some 5mm of level adjustment. The tonearm lead connects via a DIN plug under the deck and is clamped in place for strain relief. The IEC mains inlet is gold-plated!

black/clear conundrum all sounded unlike thanks to the PD-191A deftly exposing their differences.

With this high level of forensic revelation, I was driven to compare One-Steps versus other pressings, especially as I own six pressings of *Crosby Stills & Nash* including the original US release [Atlantic SD-8229], the Japanese pressing [Atlantic P-10122A], the 2023 clear vinyl Atlantic 75 reissue [RCD1 8229] and the Mobile Fidelity One-Step [UD1S 2-021]. I did this not to find out which sounded the best – a matter of taste, surely? – but to test the PD-191A's powers of analysis.

PERFECT HARMONY

This 1969 album is all about harmony, and – depending on the pressing – it was the separation of the voices that varied the most. This was down to the LPs, not Luxman's turntable, but its contribution to the sessions was allowing me to hear the differences. And what proved as valuable as the harmonies was hearing each lead vocal, by now any fan of 1960s US West Coast rock being deeply familiar with the nature of Stephen Stills', David Crosby's and Graham Nash's voices.

There were nuances galore. Stills' slight rasp, the airiness of Crosby blending with Nash while both remained distinct... the PD-191A drove me to fire up my diminutive LS3/5As just to focus on the midband. As much as it dazzled me with the bottom reaches and its analytical capabilities, the deal-maker is the authenticity of voices. (OK, stop twisting my arm: the US original sounds the best...)

Still obsessing over vinyl colours but concentrating on vocals, I pulled out both the black and clear vinyl pressings of what we're told is The Beatles' final single, the 7in

'Now And Then' [Apple 4814586]. In addition to running at 45rpm and showing me how stable it was, it let me dissect the B-side, which is of far more interest – the AI-regenerated stereo version of 'Love Me Do'. Leaving aside the shock of it sounding so unlike the familiar original, it was a lesson in how studio boffins are going to tamper with classic recordings. With the LP version also available [Apple 0602455920805], I could also compare 33.3rpm with 45rpm.

MESSAGE RECEIVED

What did it show me? That the Luxman PD-191A turntable placed John Lennon right in the middle of my listening room. Sadly, the cassette from which it was remastered isn't available to us to hear what Giles Martin managed to retrieve, but I did learn of the one weakness in the Luxman PD-191A: even this superlative turntable could not make me ever want to hear again this unfortunate and unsuitable coda to the greatest canon of popular music. But I'm not about to shoot the messenger... ☹

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Easy on the eye, at first glance as conventional as any deck-in-a-plinth one can name, but the Luxman PD-191A is as deceptive as it is heavy. This turntable is the LP spinner I would recommend to all music lovers who want superb sound but without the torture associated with (some) esoteric gear. I tell you this: if I had the money and the need for a deck, this would be in the top five of my shortlist. It's simply sublime.

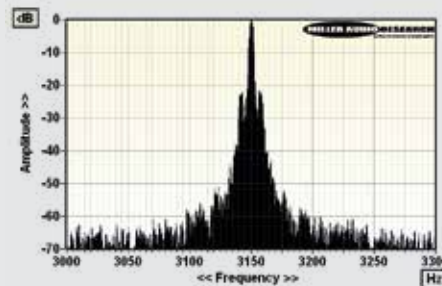
Sound Quality: 88%



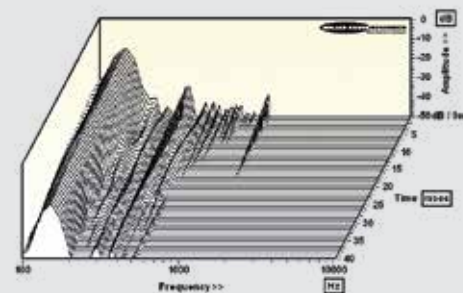
LUXMAN PD-191A

There are close parallels between this new PD-191A, its predecessor PD-171, and the earlier PD-151 [*HFN* Oct '19] which was one of the first Luxman decks to employ a new 'high torque' brushless DC motor. The motor is retained here and mounted directly onto a heavy, rubber-damped bottom plate, bringing the 5.2kg platter up to speed within 5 seconds via a substantial EPDM rubber belt. It's not uncommon to see a sub-1Hz drift with decks that employ a DC motor solution, but Luxman's PWM/PID speed controller clearly provides 'direct-drive standard' low-rate speed stability, seen in the sharpness of the main W&F peak [see Graph 1, below]. However, this same plot also reveals a ±8-9Hz high-rate wow amounting to a peak-wtd 0.06% which is unfortunate but not subjectively problematic. Speed adjustment of ±6% allows precise pitch stability to be achieved.

Luxman's sealed stainless/brass bearing assembly, with PEEK thrust pad and molybdenum oil, is familiar and achieves a direct rumble figure of -68.8dB (DIN B-wtd). The heavy rubber mat provides significant damping, reducing the through-groove rumble and noise to just -72.6dB. Meanwhile the partnering 'not quite S-shaped' LTA-710 tonearm offers an effective 256mm (10in) length, a 15g effective mass and exhibits a clearly defined main tube mode at 140Hz with harmonic/secondary resonances at 290Hz and 375Hz [see CSD waterfall, Graph 2]. Friction from the vertical knife-edge bearing is <15mg while the 'dial up' counterweight is precisely calibrated, under-reading by just 4% at 1g (1.04g) and 1% at 2g (2.02g). Just make sure you take time to dynamically balance and settle the arm before gently turning the circular indicator to read '0' at the 12 o'clock position. PM



ABOVE: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted ±150Hz, 5Hz per minor division)



ABOVE: Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.34rpm (+0.03%)
Time to audible stabilisation	5 seconds
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.06% / 0.02%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-72.6dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-68.8dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-62.6dB
Power Consumption	4W (4W idle)
Dimensions (WHD, inc. lid) / Weight	491x186x393mm / 26.4kg