



Luxman C-700u/M-700u | Preamp/power amp | £5995/£5995

"...savage crescendos..."

FOR Understated yet engaging sound; tonality; build and finish

AGAINST Preamp could be a little more expressive



Founded back in 1925 when radio broadcasting first started in Japan, Luxman is one of the oldest hi-fi brands around. Since then it has become best known for producing classy, understated source and amplification components. The brand has never made a massive splash in the UK but now, under the watchful eye of the IAG Group (alongside Quad, Audiolab, Wharfedale, Mission and others), it is trying again.

The C-700u/M-700u pre/power combination is a fine example of the company's wares - neat products that never shout out for attention, visually or sonically, but their considerable charms are likely to win you over.

Hefty and tactile

Once we wrestle them out of their packaging, the build quality grabs our attention. That's not just because the pair weigh in at over 40kg, more that they feel immensely solid and engineered to last decades.

These products are pleasingly tactile. We love the crisp action of the preamp's input selector, and the well-damped volume control works beautifully too.

There are many other examples of Luxman's art, such as the lovely machining of the M-700u power amp's ventilated top panel or the pre's nicely shaped tone controls - there's no shortage of attention to detail here, not least in the rather lovely power meters. We have a soft spot for retro details like these, but they can be turned off if you don't.

There's no shortage of connectivity. The C-700u preamp has five single-ended line-level inputs alongside a pair of stereo

balanced XLR alternatives. There's no built-in phono stage or digital inputs, but that's normal at this level. Most owners will have dedicated boxes for these tasks.

It isn't short of analogue outputs either. There are four sets, split evenly between single-ended and balanced options - ideal when a single stereo power amp will just not do.

The Luxman pre has relatively subtle tone controls, which can be of some use

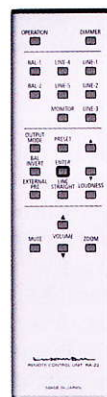
"We love the crisp action of the preamp's input selector, and the volume control works beautifully too"

with poorly balanced recordings. Purists may want to bypass the tone circuitry - worth doing for the extra clarity it brings - and they can do so at the press of a button. There's also a rarity in the form of a 'loudness' control, which adds emphasis to both frequency extremes. It can spice up the presentation at low volumes, but we leave it off most of the time.

Toggle between connections

As is the case with most power amps, the M-700u is a simple affair. It mirrors the preamp in having single-ended and balanced XLR connectivity. Usefully, you can toggle between the two options.

Look around the back and you'll find a switch to convert it from a stereo unit to a monobloc - just in case you need more grunt and have a spare £6k for a second



Small buttons, yes, but the remote is neatly arranged and weighty enough

KEY FEATURES



BALANCED XLR CONNECTIVITY



SEVEN LINE-LEVEL INPUTS



120W PER CHANNEL

unit. There aren't many systems where that will be necessary though as, when used in stereo, the M-700u delivers 120W per channel into an 8ohm load.

This increases strongly to 210W per side as impedance halves. Difficult-to-drive speakers shouldn't be a problem with such reserves.

The support act matters

Neither of these units is small, so you'll need a substantial support. Make sure that rack is rigid and low-resonance - these are sensitive electronics that will reward such care with improvements in sound quality. Both units give off a fair bit of heat when pushed hard too, so it's a good idea to position them in a place with decent ventilation, as that's generally good for reliability.

Amplification of this standard requires a top-class system to shine - it can only ever be as good as the source allows. We use our trusty Naim NDS/555PS streamer supplemented by Clearaudio's Innovation Wood record-playing package. The C-700u doesn't have a built-in phono stage so Cyrus's rather good Phono Signature/PSX-R2 fills in superbly. Our long-serving ATC SCM50 speakers complete the system.

If ever there were a pre/power combination that shouldn't be judged on the first listen this is it. Straight from the box the sound is thick, soft and lacking clarity. Leave it running overnight and things improve markedly.

Once properly warmed, this combination delivers a tidy sound that matches the way it looks. The



Chunky speaker posts give a secure connection. The unit can work as a monobloc if you need even more power



We love the fine machining of the ventilation ports...

...and the solid, pleasing action of the major controls

Plenty of line-level inputs, plus XLR connectivity



"Notes stop and start crisply and there's a lovely organic flow to the sound that puts us in mind of the best valve-powered gear, but here without a hint of excess warmth or richness"

edges of notes are precise, never overstated and delivered in a steady, controlled manner. Sounds boring? Not a bit of it, as we discover when we play Macklemore and Lewis's *Thrift Shop*.

There's so much energy in this track and the Luxmans communicate it well. Their presentation is fast, agile and rendered with precision. Notes stop and start crisply, but never in a stilted way. There's a lovely organic flow to the sound that puts us in mind of the best valve-powered gear, but here without a hint of excess warmth or richness.

A firm hold

Rhythmically things are pretty good too. While no dance machine, this pairing keeps a firm hold of the rhythmic elements of the track, delivering that distinctive bassline with punch and authority. It's refined too, refusing to allow the recording's slightly hard edge to become an annoyance. It's a fine balance that retains plenty of bite but always stops short of harshness.

Macklemore's characterful vocal is clear and easy to follow, but there's a slight lack of expression, the Luxmans glossing over some of the dynamic nuances and subtle shifts in pace that go into making his delivery so distinctive.

We like the tonal balance, though. It's even and convincing, something brought home when we listen to *Kind Of Blue* by Miles Davis - the Luxmans convey the varying tension of the music well.

Switching to Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* shows off this combo's impressive

sense of scale and authority. The pair images well, creating an expansive, nicely layered soundstage that's populated with crisply focused instruments. It's capable of huge dynamics too, and can deliver the piece's savage crescendos with enthusiasm.

So, not flawless - but we're pretty impressed. We're also curious to find out how the pre- and power sound with different partners. We draft in our reference Gamut D3i/D200i pre/power for comparison. It turns out that the C-700u is the weaker of the pairing. Listen to the Gamut preamp with the Luxman power and there's more dynamic expression, particularly with low-level shifts. This makes vocals sound more emotional. Timing improves too.

A superb £6k power amp

The M-700u is a star, though. It doesn't quite have the insight of the pricier Gamut D200i, but shows enough in the way of dynamics, timing and cohesion to really impress us. It's got to be one of the best £6k power amps around.

Despite our criticisms of the preamp, this Luxman pairing is tempting. Build is top-class and (for the most part) these units just get out of the way of the music, and that's a quality that's far less common than it should be.

WHAT HI-FI? says

LUXMAN C-700U PREAMP RATING ★★★★★

SOUND	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★

FOR Very precise and articulate presentation; impressive connectivity; superb build and finish

AGAINST It could be a little more expressive and insightful

VERDICT A pleasure to use and built to a high standard. It's well equipped too

LUXMAN M-700U POWER AMP RATING ★★★★★

SOUND	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★

FOR Understated but still engaging sound; convincing tonality; fine scale, authority and imaging; exceptional build and finish

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT A deeply impressive power amp that combines finesse with force better than most, and adds terrific build quality