Luxman D-05u

TURNING ON THE STYLSUS

By Jochen Reinecke. Images: Ingo Schulz, Manufacturer

Seven years for a “u”—not bad. Luxman’s D-05 CD/SACD player, launched in 2009, has been upgraded and is now called D-05u. But what’s evident is that much, much more than just a letter has been changed.

— Sometimes when I indulge in a spot of whistle-wetting in various dives and hostotries of an evening with colleagues from the writing fraternity, they enviously whisper something like this in my shell-like: “Turned your hobby into your job,” or: “Must be great writing about hi-fi and earning money for doing it.” But all I can say is: What would happen if you sent a cocaine addict the most crystalline of substances every six weeks, and then request them to return the drug to the sender after testing it? Hi-fi journalism as a means of earning a living—raucous laughter all round! And your costs keep on spiraling, because you keep on wanting more, more, more! That applies in particular to the latest offering from Luxman: the D-05u, a CD player, SACD player and DAC all rolled into one. I only returned it reluctantly and grudgingly to the editorial team, not only because of its weight, but especially because of the great sound it produced.

CAST MEMBERS

Digital sources: C.E.C. CD 5, iPod Classic 5 (160GB) with Pro-Ject Dock Box S Digital, Notebook with Foobar and Logitech Squeeze-box-Server | DAC: B.M.C. PureDac | Record player: Rega RP-1 with Ortofon Quintet Red | Phone pre-amplifier: Pro-Ject Phono Box MM | Output amplifier: Audreal MS-3 | Loudspeakers: Tammoi Tumberry Gold Reference, Quadral Rondo, Nubert rubio 101 | Cables: Goldkabel Profi (NF), Oehlbach XXL Series 7 Mk II (digital, coaxial), Oehlbach XXL Series 80 (digital, optical audio), Ortofon SPK 500 (LS), Real Cable OFC 400 (LS)
It is the designated successor to the D-05, but this redesign includes various features that have been radically changed. The most important innovation involves the D/A converter. Instead of using the proven PCM1792A from Texas Instruments, the D-05u features the PCM1795 for the first time—in fact in dual configuration. It is not exactly a newcomer either, having been unveiled by Texas Instruments in 2009. Its analog section more or less corresponds to that of the 1792, yet its digital interpolation filter is 32bit-capable. So while the D-05 utilizes a 24bit chip, the D-05u sports all of two 32bit chips. Luxman’s engineers have calculated that this detail will not only optimize channel separation but also to allow for internal oversampling up to 384 kHz. Incidentally, as far as reproduction is concerned, the willing listener has a choice between two PCM filters and two analog transfer filters for SACD and DSD modes. Many numbers, so many letters, isn’t that just awful? Let’s focus on more fundamental issues.

The wonderfully neat front panel design! And the workmanshop! The lucky owner only has to heave just a shade under 15 kilograms into their rack. Haptic quality is nothing less than superb: Heavy, solid, a whopper, a humdinger of a CD player. The disc tray extends almost silently; it seems so sturdy, you could presumably place a half-liter bottle of your favorite amber nectar on it and it won’t bend. It is part of a playback mechanism developed by Luxman itself that goes by the unwieldy name of “Luxman Original Disc Transport Mechanism”. The drive is located in a double enclosure, which is intended to dampen vibrations effectively—and the D-05u is indeed one of those players that operate almost silently. You can’t hear any chirping or any humming noise from your listening position.

But how does the Luxman player do that? I believe it’s down to its clarity, honesty and no-compromise attitude in nearly all respects. Tonality-wise it can draw on an embarrassment of riches. Bases are deep and powerful, they have clarity and structure. Mid-range tones gliten in a full blaze of color and trebles are crisp, have perfect resolution and are “à point” in the way of three-dimensionality, magnitude and transparency when playing high-resolution material is absolutely unique.

What is provided is the LCD display, from a distance of several meters. What is not quite so elegant is not only the really visually appealing remote control with an all-metal housing that is a joy to hold, and more and more trebles keep on entering the sound pattern—and after a few minutes the track dissipates into a major chord of crystal clarity. A hustling, bulldozing track. And the D-05u stays there. Why? Well now, even if the editor is provocative as far as reproduction is concerned, the willing listener has salved their ear-bashing, with a D-05u in the room you look forward, spellbound with excitement, to this deliverance. The advance sales tax return that still needs to be completed, the dishwasher that needs to be emptied, the lasagne in the oven, the lady visitor who is going to ring the doorbell in ten minutes—all forgotten, out of the picture, doesn’t matter. That is a really major achievement.

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like a good entrecôte—neither too bright nor too shadowy, just exactly as yielded by the recording. The same applies to dynamics. When the synthesizer steps up the volume and its bustling at the end of the track, this increasing compression is then passed on without any dynamic or temporal delay. However, the standout talent is the three-dimensionality. Seldom have I previously heard such an explicit and absolute separation of acoustic sources, and just as seldom do you listen to SACDs or high-res files from a computer it gets worse. Thoroughly genuine, incorruptible and uncomplicated Japanese quality.

Let's not forget we were talking Red Book standard in Audio CD terms. One's state of bliss increases on going to the next track's soul, its essence on a silver tray. Head on. During the final movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 3 the listener is able to approach a state of transcendence. The composer leaves the first 50 bars Bruckner-style. That's until the first piercing wind instrument enters the fray, beaming the first demons into a blurred hull. Perhaps recall that I was recently very taken with the C.E.C. CD5, and that I purchased it after the test. This too features a superb D/A stage (with Sabre chip set), meaning I also use it now as a reference DAC. The Luxman D-05u on the other hand actually ups its game in terms of quality, on the one hand by achieving an even better spatial separation of acoustic sources and on the other with the bass. The latter really does seem to deepen substantially without coming across as exaggerated or overemphasised. If you want to exploit the D-05u's potential to the full, you are recommended to connect it to a computer via a USB port. What is provided in the way of three-dimensionality, magnitude and transparency when playing high-resolution material is absolutely unique. For example, there is a brand new remaster of John Coltrane’s Soultrane in 96kHz format at Highresaudio.com. A really good job was done here, because the recording was per se spatially awesome, but suffered a little from hissing trebles and dull bass in places. In this format, converted via the D-05u, it now sounds really clear, tonality-wise, but above all explosively dynamic—in a positive sense. This makes hard bop fun to listen to—a vitalizing blend of breakneck drum grooves, in-your-face saxophone and effervescent piano play. What are you left with after the listening session? Positive, straight-up exhaustion! The Luxman D-05u lets its owners share in the thrills, suffering and joys of audio indulgence—it plays incorruptibly and neverless delivers pure emotion. Omedetōgozaimasu! (Congratulations!) •