

Luxury Luxman



The new PD-171A turntable from Luxman looks good, sounds sublime and is a joy to operate, says Noel Keywood.

Once owned a Luxman PD 300 vacuum deck, an extraordinary turntable that sucked LPs down onto the platter. Held firm, they sounded better – until they started becoming noisy that is. Whether this was due to dirt being forced into the grooves or bubbles in the vinyl bursting I never found out – there was much speculation over this peculiar phenomenon.

Unsurprisingly Luxman abandoned that idea a long time ago, but the newly updated PD-171 – now a PD-171A – reminded me of their

intriguing disc spinner of yesteryear. It is similarly a two-speed, belt drive turntable of impeccable build quality, having the same lustrous finish of the great 1970s classics.

As solid as the PD 300 was, however, it wasn't the weight of the latest PD-171A that comes in at a whopping 25.4kgs. One reason for the weight is the use of a vibration damped structure with 15mm thick machined aluminium top plate. Once in place it sits with the firm certainty that nothing is going to move it, making for a satisfying user experience. There's no suspension

system, as with my Garrard 401, so this beastie must be mounted on a very strong shelf or table unaffected by floor-bounce. A beautifully made clear acrylic cover protects against dust and provides some measure of sound deadening; it moves on hinges so you do not have to lift it off. A turntable as large as this takes up space of course, needing a 14in deep shelf as minimum.

The operating buttons move with slick precision, as always on Lux products, and speed change is simply a matter of pressing 33rpm or 45rpm buttons as you might



A calibrated counterweight applies downforce and a rotary dial sets outward bias.

hope at the price – no faffing around with belts here. Each speed can be adjusted individually, using front mounted rotary controls. To help in this process Luxmn fit an internally illuminated stroboscope that shines at markings on the platter. Unfortunately, it wasn't very bright and in a room filled with sunlight I could barely see what the markings were doing through the small viewing window. At lower light levels the display was dull but visible; the markings become stationary when speed is set correctly. Although usable the Lux display wasn't as eye catching as either my Garrard or a Technics Direct Drive – slightly disappointing as these things visually enliven a turntable. You do get a cueing light, however.

Inside the plinth lies a newly developed high torque a.c.



We used an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC cartridge for review purposes.

synchronous motor fed by an electronic supply that, Lux say, uses a power amplifier to feed frequency adjustable a.c. power to the motor. The frequency generator uses a stable clock as a reference, with a 32bit 'microphone' embedded – I suspect the Japanese-to-English translator means 'microprocessor' here! The motor needs high torque to start the enormously heavy 5kgs platter and even then the PD-171A is not overly fast to start, taking a second or two to come up to speed. Mains power is fed in via an IEC socket on the rear; there is no external supply, so nothing lurking on the floor or poking out of the wall.

The arm follows classic 1970s Japanese design principles, although some may argue most of these were originally devised by SME on the 3009 of the 1960s. It is S shaped, has a detachable headshell and calibrated rotary counterweight. Arms of old like this would ring like a tubular



A d.c. servo motor with single step pulley drives a belt that loops around the outside edge of the platter.

is 4gms-12gms, which covers most. A heavier counterweight is available, but there are very few cartridges around weighing more than 12gms. Bias is set by turning a calibrated dial.



Two speeds, independent speed adjusters and stroboscope markings, visible through a small window. Speed is adjusted so the markings appear stationary.

bell and the headshell connector and headshell platform were often less than rigid but there's a lot you can do to eliminate such simple weaknesses and Lux have taken appropriate measures in the PD-171A, dampening the arm tube to stop it ringing and using a rigid headshell platform to suppress high frequency vibrations.

Why a removable headshell? It is to aid cartridge changing, as well as making fitment easier. It's almost essential if you want to play 78s, as some do, but this raises the fact that the PD-171A has no 78 speed, unlike Technics SL-1200GAE and McIntosh MT-5 turntables I have reviewed recently. But then the fastidious may still want to use a pure mono cartridge with a larger stylus to play early 33rpm LPs and 45rpm singles and this the PD-171A does make simple.

The arm's cartridge weight range

SOUND QUALITY

I fitted an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil (MC) cartridge to the PD-171A and connected it into our Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage, with volume control. It fed Quad QMP mono blocks, or alternatively an Icon Audio Stereo 30 SE valve amplifier, feeding Martin Logan ESL-X hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers.

Turntables reveal their signature slowly – and it is both subtle but deep, framing the basic sonic nature of what you hear. Having spent much time recently with both a Tilmestep EVOke Technics SL-1200GAE Direct Drive of all metal construction, and a Macintosh MT-5 belt drive that conversely relies on a massive acrylic platter, I was intrigued to hear the Luxman PD-171A fall somewhere between them.

I was impressed, even beguiled by this turntable's properties. It is one

sweet sounding turntable with a light and airy midband, solid dynamics that make for a punchy sound – but not over-done – and superb soundstage depth. It didn't have the extraordinary rifle-bolt timing of the Technics nor the darker palette of McIntosh, but hovered somewhere between them.

Spinning Dire Straits 'Ride Across The River' from Brothers In Arms revealed a clean background

from 2L of Norway. Here the Luxman shone. It was this LP that confirmed its character, Marianne Thorsen's violin coming over as sweet natured, lush with detail and vibrant in nature. There was superb resolution of tonal colour here, the timbral properties of the violin – and indeed that of the backing strings – being obvious. I wondered why anyone would ever criticise LP for its rendering of classical



The Luxman arm bolts onto the turntable and is removable. A version without arm is available.

The arm uses a traditional removable headshell that facilitates quick cartridge changing.

made for fine dynamic contrasts, giving hand drums a good sense of body and strength, making them jump out of the mix. The bass line was supple but well-defined in its dynamics, the catchy reggae timing made clear by a strong grip on tempo. Cicada chirps slowly emerged in the background, nicely teased out by the 171A's excellent retrieval of detail. My notes talk of a CD-like patina but a smoother and more revealing nature than silver disc.

The synthesised drum beats of Scissor Sisters' 'Comfortably Numb' were metronomically timed: powerful and insistent. There wasn't quite the grip of a Direct Drive, but not everyone needs this. What the Luxman had is a tad more dynamic punch and stage depth. It was sort-of like listening to a fabo CD player, the one you dream about getting rather than the one you actually get!

Which brings me to Mozart violin concertos on a 180gm LP



A large brass bodied main bearing supports the platter.

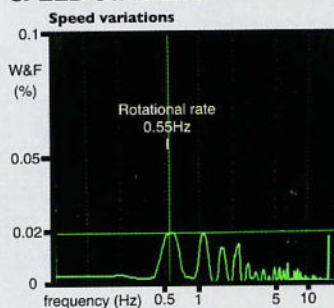
instruments whilst listening to this - but of course they don't so much as become distracted by surface noise. No LP is ever quite free of ticks and pops but modern vinyls like Quiex SVP and modern stylus profiles do much to suppress this. Of course, you can't do anything about old much-loved and heavily played LPs that have become noisy but quality classical LPs such as those from 2L are in another league and offer superb sound with classical. The Luxman showed me just how good it can get. I was deeply impressed by what it achieved here and think anyone would be.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

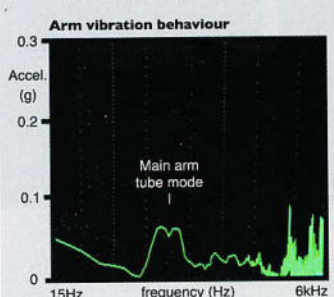
With the stroboscope set by eye, the PD-171A rotated accurately at exactly 33.3rpm and held speed with an interesting degree of stability for a belt drive; it performed more like a Direct Drive in this respect.

However, there was, all the same,

SPEED STABILITY



ARM VIBRATION



CONCLUSION

The upgraded PD-171A come across as a honey to listen to; I could not fault it. It has airy and spacious presentation that especially suited Icon Audio's SE valve amplifier driving Martin Logan electrostatics. What I heard was utter refinement from this vinyl spinner. It was easy to use and in Luxman tradition is a solidly made and finely finished work of art. Only the barely visible stroboscope was a disappointment but I'm not sure that's too much of an issue.

a bit more wow at 0.55Hz (basic rotational rate) than Direct Drive our analysis shows, in the small peak at this frequency, with a measured value of 0.12% unweighted – low for belt drive.

There was – very surprisingly for a heavy platter – some flutter, the W&F meter recording a value of 0.1% against 0.06% expected. It can be seen as a sharp spike at far right in our Speed Stability analysis.

All the same, the total, DIN weighted Wow&Flutter figure was 0.08% – a good result for a belt drive.

The arm had a main arm tube mode at 300Hz, a high value that indicates a stiff structure, and it is well damped too, the resonant peak being relatively small. Vibration in the headshell was well suppressed, making it relatively quiet – quieter than most.

The PD-171A measured well being speed accurate as well as speed stable, except for a small amount of flutter. The arm is both stiff and well damped. **NK**

Speed error	0%
Wow	0.12%
Flutter	0.1%
Total W&F weighted	0.08%

LUXMAN PD-171A
£4,995



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

A superbly built and finished belt-drive turntable with an airy and open sound. Easy to set up and use too. Lovely.

FOR

- sound quality
- ease of use
- appearance

AGAINST

- dim stroboscope
- very heavy
- no 78rpm

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