

## LINE PREAMPLIFIER

LUXMAN  
C-1000f

WOJCIECH PACUŁA

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There was some trouble with the preparation of the [Luxman C-1000f](#) preamplifier test. It is not that it is always easy with other devices, but in this case it was really time consuming. At first it was to arrive in Poland together with two power amplifiers [M-800A](#). It did not. Then it was to arrive with the next order and – again nothing. The device prepared for the 80th anniversary of the brand (Lux corporation was founded in Japan in 1925) together with the partnering monoblocs B-1000f is by definition a limited product. But because Luxman succeeded in those “jubilee” products to achieve such a high level of manufacturing and sound quality that they can compete with best products of the world, the pressure from distributors fighting for subsequent units is incredible from the very beginning. Every piece is hand made and only when ordered by a distributor. And because Lux started only recently in Poland, our country – fate – is at the end of the waiting list. But... Either the warm welcome in Poland or quick introduction of the brand made the Luxman representative, Mr. Dominic Chun help us. And he helped more than we could ever dream of – he “took” from headquarters the preamplifier that was to remain in the company museum – with the 00001 serial number. This number is visible on the back plate, on the bottom of it, just next to the anniversary plaque (“80th anniversary”). We could say that we deal with a device that is already a collector’s item.



And I wanted the Luxman, because very quickly, already during the test of the mentioned power amplifier M-800A I realized, that we deal here with a new quality. This working in the class A, 60-watt power amplifier turned out to be extremely precise and at the same time incredibly sensitive to music, as if it would not be a hi-fi device but "living device". So I couldn't do anything better than buy the tested unit for my reference system. Shortly afterwards the device received our Product of the [Year award 2007](#). There was no other way... That is why from the very beginning my attention was focused on the preamplifiers made by this company – C-800f and C-1000f. The device is mounted inside a very massive, ultra-rigid aluminum enclosure (the front panel is 30mm thick in the thickest place), and the bottom plate is made from three layers connected by a special gluey material – a layer of aluminum, a layer of copper and again aluminum. The device is heavier than most integrated amplifiers until 20000zl and for sure with better workmanship. Model C-1000f is fully balanced, and its heart is the volume control circuitry named LECUA1000 (LECUA is an abbreviation of Luxman Electronic Controlled Ultimate Attenuator), designed in such a way, that for every one of the 72 steps, only two resistors are in the sound path. When we look inside we will see that there are four identical devices, one for each branch ("+" and "-"). It looks incredible. And one sighs at the very beginning, as the front panel with embedded volume control and input selector knobs and an amber display is SOMETHING.

## SOUND

The Luxman preamplifier plays with an incredibly creamy, incredibly well mannered sound. If I would place the preamplifiers I remember on an axis, where to the right we would have the most precise and at the same time most neutral ones, but also the least "fleshy" and least "saturated" (although supplying enormous amounts of music) then the situation would look like this:

**WARM**

**COLD**



Luxman C-1000f...Accuphase C-2810...Nagra PL-P...Accuphase C-2410...darTZeel NHB-18NS...[Leben RS-28CX](#)...Audio Research Reference RS3...BAT VK-52SE



This "warm-cold" is of course a simplification, because it is about a certain "package" of characteristics, where warmth or coldness are elements that are easiest to describe. However resolution is related to those, and it is split on the axis in the same way. All mentioned preamplifiers are superb, and each one is different. Did you notice something peculiar? I mean that it is not important if a device is solid state or tube. Looking from left to right we have: transistor-transistor-tube-transistor-transistor-tube-tube-tube. And this turns the traditional view of the solid state as "cold" and tube as "warm" completely over. I think we finally reached a point, where cheap tricks with speed (transistor) and saturation (tube) are no longer enough, and the game is about neutrality, about hi-end. Neutrality is, as one can imagine, a subjective thing, but it can be excluded in some boundaries, where opinions can be set, where our choices are only that and nothing else – choices.

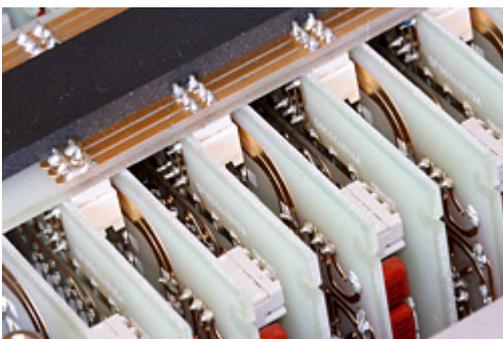
And I write this on purpose – as we can see, the Luxman C-1000f, a device solid state to the bone marrow, is on the left end of the scale, where we would like to put the tube preamps. Because this is how this "Japanese boy" sounds: with an incredibly saturated, full midrange, sweet, but without coloring, to which the treble and bass are subordinate. So the vocals are uncommon – whether from an aged recording [Lullabys of Birdland Chris Connor](#) (Bethlehem Records/Victor Entertainment, VICJ-61452, K2 HD, CD) or a fresh one, the splendid disc [Filia Praeclara](#) Ensemble Peregrina (Divox Antiqua, CDX-70603, CD) with recordings of XIII and XIV century Polish Poor Clare monastery music. Every time we had full, big volume, smooth, creamy timbre, splendidly given reverb and with this very good positioning of the instruments. The device has saturated timbre and slightly soft attack. Looking at tonal balance in the Luxman it is set in a more laid back way than in the Leben, that on the other hand was darker than the Accuphase C-2410. Because like I said, everything is subordinate to the midrange. Instruments like the piano and saxophone do also sound spectacular. In absolute terms the resolution is lower than in

the BAT or AR, or even Leben, what is additionally deepened by the tame treble, but when I put on the disc *The Köln Concert* Keith Jarrett (ECM, UCCE-9011, gold-CD) from the Japanese, gold mini LP version, that is visibly less vivid and not as transparent as the aluminum version, Luxman showed the audience better, placed it better in space than my Leben, that is more penetrating and resolving. The same happened with the elements from the disc of Art Pepper *AP Meets The Rhythm Section* (Contemporary Records/Victor Entertainment, VICJ-41524, K2, CD). I don't know how this happened. But this is just how it is with top devices, nothing is easy and unambiguous.



It was similar with dynamics. On the mentioned Pepper disc the dynamics of drums and percussion is registered in such a way, that God should give such abilities to current sound engineers. Roy DuNann that recorded that discs, has something wonderful in his fingers because the disc *Way Out West* Sonny'ego Rollinsa (Contemporary Records/Victor Entertainment, VICJ-60088, XRCD) is also brilliant, and he was also responsible for that one. But to the point – Luxman reproduces jumps of dynamics like the best tube amplifiers. Or maybe a solid state one? I don't know it myself anymore – maybe it combines the best from both worlds. Because it is gentle and dynamic. Listening to it we enter in a completely different world, something similar as with Accuphase. Also fascinating is the comparison of both devices, it turns out that Accu plays a bit more "to the front" with slightly better defined edges, but still the sound of the Luxman is more saturated, more "physical" in appearance. Both devices are brilliant, but they are not the same, that is why they must be auditioned in a given system.

I write the whole time about the primacy of the midrange, maybe not as resolving as with the preamplifiers from the right part of the scale, but incredibly nice. And this is not the classic cut of treble and bass. It is not about that. I do not want to mix-up my thinking, but subjectively those sub-ranges are heard quieter. But when in a recording a stronger impulse appears that is located there, like the strong, motoric bass from *Billie Jean*, from the disc *Thriller* Michael Jackson (Epic/Sony Music Japan, EICP 963-4, CD+DVD), then we have strong entrance and playing with pep, in a matter of speech. Leben differentiates the single sounds better, shows more about the way of playing, etc, but it is the Luxman that seemed more dynamic. It had not such a well articulated bass, but attention was not focused on it. Maybe due to such a volume of sounds the Luxman is more natural, better than the Leben, which – in direct comparison – sounds with smaller virtual sources.



And this is how this preamplifier must be "read" – like an incredibly saturated, focused on the midrange, dynamic device. The resolution is not super-important here, or quarrelsomeness. Here my Leben was visibly better and it describes the edges, shades of the timbre, temperature of the recordings, etc, better. With jazz and classical material we will get a big sound stage with regular size instruments. Luxman is brilliantly built, much better than everything I saw before. Maybe only the darTZeel NHB-18NS could compete with that. This is a device for ever, not only because it is heavy as hell and packing it back is an effort. But we should remember that it has a specified timbre and "personality" and it is necessary to listen to it personally, in our own system. In contrast to the preamplifier EVO 222 from Krell, that was the ideal partner for the EVO 402 power amplifier (system review [HERE](#)) and outside the company context it sounded with a bit too heavy lower midrange, the Luxman will be a good partner for every type of power amplifier – tube or solid state – as long as it is a good power amplifier. It is worth to remember that this is a balanced device and sounds best in a balanced system. And then it will be brilliant.

## DESCRIPTION



Like I mentioned, the preamplifier C-1000f is packed in a very thick enclosure made from cast elements. Interestingly, similar to the M-800A power amplifier and many tube devices or products of the British [Cyrus](#) everything is mounted upside down. This means that the whole electronics just “hangs” below the massive top cover – this was done to better control vibration. In the front we have two knobs – one for volume control and one for input selection, power switch, alphanumeric display and status LEDs. We can choose the balanced or unbalanced output, bi-amping or change the absolute phase (like Accuphase, Marantz, Denon and other Japanese brands Luxman uses pin ‘3’ of the XLR as the ‘hot’ pin. In European and most American devices the ‘hot’ pin is nr ‘2’). On the back we have three balanced inputs, three unbalanced ones, two balanced and two unbalanced outputs. All sockets are of very good quality, gold plated. Also the IEC socket is gold plated. On top of it we’ll find the characteristic plate used for phasing control. There are also two “trigger” sockets (CAT-5 based) that can be used to remotely control the power amplifiers.

Unscrewing the bottom plate we see that it is cast and made from three layers – aluminum-copper-aluminum. Below we see four identical amplifying modules, each with its own power supply. Those are the LECUA1000 attenuators and the current feedback loop called ODNF. According to the company web page this is a version of the feedback, that takes the signal from the output, compares it with the input and only the difference is added to the signal to compensate. The people from Luxman say, that their company introduced the usage of feedback for the very first time so they have lots of experience in that area. The LECUA and ODBF blocks are made from twelve vertical PCBs per branch plugged into two motherboards. So this is not a very simple circuit. Besides those there are also PCBs with the input and output selectors with hermetic relays and PCBs with initial power supplies for LECUA and ODNF. Many wires run between them – power and signal ones. In general there are many power supply stages and its regulation, with many capacitors and stabilizers. There are also two transformers – separately for the amplifying circuits and for the display and logic. Already the input AC current is filtered in four stages with capacitors and ferrite elements. The amplifying circuit is made with discrete bipolar transistors. Also the balancing and de-balancing circuits are made like this – the signal is balanced just before RCA inputs and de-balanced just before the RCA output. Really beautifully made. The PCBs are made on Teflon base without a classic ‘mask’ that has a negative influence on the copper on the traces according to the engineers. In Luxman transparent plastic covers are used, that are removed after etching. And the traces are then covered with gold, just to be sure. The device is remote controlled by a metal remote RA-10, not very good looking, but very sturdy and allowing also to dim or switch off the display or change the absolute phase, besides the usual functions of volume control and input selection. Nice, very nice...