



Luxman D-05u

TURNING ON THE STYLUS

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 hostelrys 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 | **Phono pre-amplifier:** Pro-Ject Phono Box MM | **Output amplifier:** Audreal MS-3 | **Loudspeakers:** Tannoy Turnberry Gold Reference, Quadral Rondo, Nubert nuBox 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 transversal filters for SACD and DSD modes. So 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 workmanship! 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 Transportation 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.

What is also elegant is not only the really visually appealing remote control with an all-metal housing that is a joy to hold, so is the monochrome dot-matrix display, because its look is not only ageless, the display is also amazingly easy to read from a distance of several meters. What is not quite so elegant, you could quibble, is the absence of a headphone port. On the other hand: anybody who shops in this price category and regularly uses headphones presumably owns their own headphone amp anyhow.

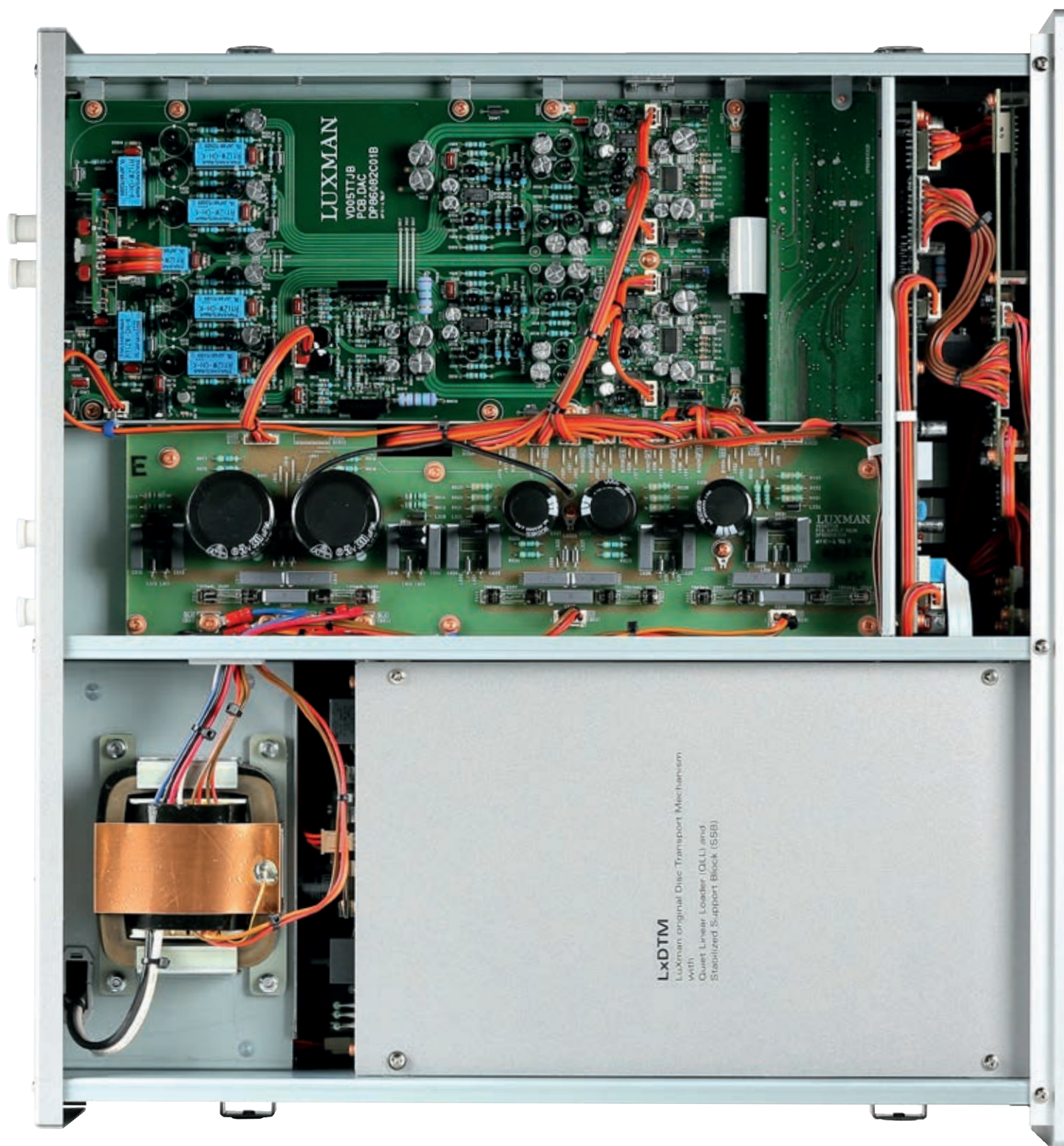
A quick glance at the rear panel: The D-05u is easy to connect with. Besides one analog RCA and one XLR output terminal,

the player features three digital input terminals (USB, optical audio, coaxial) and two digital output terminals (optical audio, coaxial). That is laudable and provides a certain level of investment security, because in this way it also functions as required as a DAC or pure CD drive.

Now let's get down to some listening. The reviewer browses the CD collection and briefly pauses at Radiohead's *Kid A* album. Oh well, why not? Simply played the first few bars of the first track, "Everything In Its Right Place". Jaw drops and stays there. Why? Well now, even if the editor is provocatively balancing the fully electronic text checker in his hands, I am going to say it: The D-05u suddenly serves me this track's soul, its essence on a silver tray, head on. The less squeamish occasionally like to describe this track as cacophony. An electronic bass drum, stubbornly pounding away, provides the rhythm. Muffled synthesizer chords from Jonny Greenwood's evidence vault are wafting about to the left, Thom Yorke is wailing away in the center, while on the right all this lamentation darts doubled up, partially backwards, partially forwards, partially high-pitched about your ears. It's as if somebody has stripped down an antique Echolette and reassembled it incorrectly. Right on the boundaries of the atonal, pure sound mush when you first listen to it. But: there is method to this madness. It follows a clear concept. The synthesizer's analog filters keep on being turned up subtly, 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 is able to mirror this very same hustling of the listener towards a cathartic place of refuge. Instead of sitting there helplessly surrendering to an 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.

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 glisten in a full blaze of color and trebles are crisp, have perfect resolution and are "à point" ►

What is provided in the way of three-dimensionality, magnitude and transparency when playing high-resolution material is absolutely unique.



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 hustling 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 such substantial and realistic virtual mid-range tones.

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 level, i.e. listening to an SACD. 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

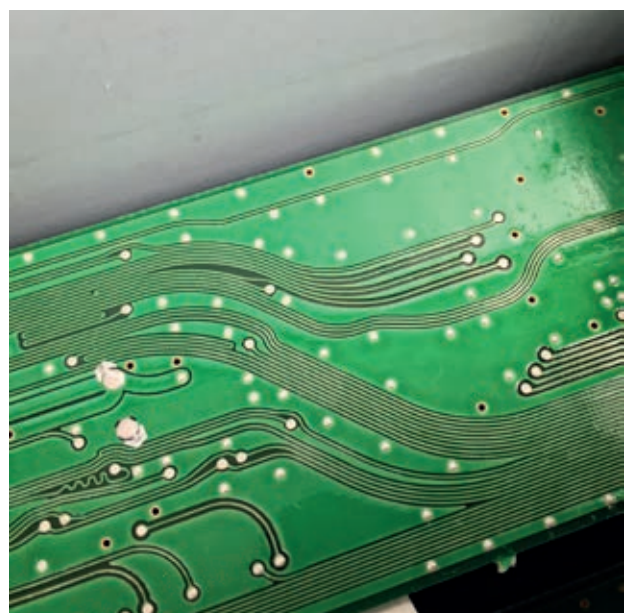
exclusively in the hands of the string section, in order to pour a sheer sense of wellbeing over the listener—almost Anton Bruckner-style. That's until the first piercing wind instruments enter the fray, beaming the first demons into a blurred world. The effect, the sense of inclusion that this player delivers is difficult to express in words, therefore let me put it another way. Actually I just wanted to listen in for the first couple of minutes. But I ended up taking in the full 26-minute Monty—right up to the furious finale with its powerful major conclusion. That is serious listening pleasure.

One more thing needs to be commented on. The D-05u does not gloss things over. That's because the SACD's higher resolution, as we all know, not only captures more three-dimensionality, more play in the trebles, more fine detail, ►

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Clarity, honesty and a no-compromise attitude in nearly all respects

but also picks up interference like the mild rushing sound of the pre-amp when miking, the inevitable coughing in the audience or even occasionally a minor recording distortion if the kettle drums are banged too fiercely. The D-05u provides that too. In for a penny, in for a pound—but that's how it should be with equipment in this price category.

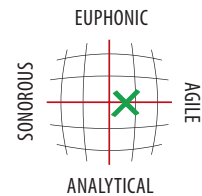
Anybody who activates the internal DAC from outside is also in for a very pleasant surprise. Alert readers may perhaps recall that I was recently very taken with the C.E.C. CD5, and that I purchased it after the test. This too features a superb D/A stage (with Sabre chip set), meaning I also use it now 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 overemphasized.

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

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Luxman D-05u

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SACD/CD Player/DAC

Luxman D-05u

Input terminals: 2 x S/PDIF (coaxial, optical audio), 1 x USB (max. 32 bit/384 kHz and DSD 128/5.6) | **Output terminals (analog):** symmetrical (XLR), asymmetrical (RCA) | **Output terminals (digital):** coaxial, optical audio | **Digital filters:** 2 x PCM, 2 x DSD | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 44/13.5/41 cm | **Weight:** 15 kg | **Color:** Silver | **Warranty period:** 2 years | **Price:** 4,990 €

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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 nevertheless delivers pure emotion. Omedetōgozaimasu! (Congratulations!) ■