

Audiodrom

LUXMAN L-507uX

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Aesthetics of afterglow

If a renowned audio manufacturer delists two successful amplifiers to replace them with a single new model, there must be a reason. Luxman did exactly this by replacing its L-507u and L-509u integrated amps with the brand new L-507uX to establish a new leader of its class AB amplifiers. The L-507uX builds upon the fantastic Luxman L-590AX that we had reviewed earlier with the aim to preserve as much magic as possible of its class A topology and enhance power handling capabilities that are in principle quite modest with the class A. The mission has been successfully completed recently and here comes the proof.



Those who succumb to blue-lit VU meters of McIntosh amplifiers will find the Luxman L-507uX irresistible. Its sized indicators are a real visual treat for any audiophile enthusiast and when combined with the amplifier's excellent sonics we have the clear winner. Yet, if you prefer listening in the dark, the indigo meters can be switched off by pressing METER button on the Luxman's remote controller – this operation leaves only a small LED diode glowing into the night. The provided remote (RA-17) is among the best I've seen; not only does it provide access to all necessary functions but it is also ergonomically designed with sufficient spacing between the buttons so after few minutes it is easy to find the right one even in mittens and with closed eyes.

Even if - for any reason - you really do prefer a different audio aesthetics, you cannot but applaud to Luxman for the level of craftsmanship for which the Yokohama produced models are famous. The L-507uX's chassis is honed up to perfection that is hardly seen anywhere else. The hair-thin matching of the parts, smooth and fitting knobs and matt and glossy surfaces that intertwine in silvery harmony are what makes the L-507uX delight for eyes and fingers and a kind of luxury car among economy class machines. Ask a happy owner of a Luxman amplifier for his permission to touch the knobs and you will realize what I mean. It is quite easy to navigate in Luxman's amplifiers – the class A models glow with yellow backlit VU meters whereas the class AB uses the aforementioned polar blue.



The L-507uX is built around three pairs of bipolar devices per channel that operate in parallel push-pull. The preceding model (L-507u) had only two pairs of bipolar devices – as such the L-507uX offers the technology that was previously available only with the L-509u step-up

model. Other than that the L-507uX uses carefully matched and hand selected parts, many of them being manufactured right to Luxman's specifications – this is the case of filtration capacitors with storage capacity of 40.000 μ F or a hand-wound EI-core transformer that was adapted to minimize EMI radiation. Better start up characteristics and compact size won the battle against traditional toroids. The transformer is mounted to the chassis via elastic decoupling not unlike the engine of a car – though a small detail it gives the flavor of Luxman's passion and attention with which they design their audio components.



LECUA & Co.

The good news is that the L-507uX has got inspired quite a lot from the L-590AX that I consider to be the excellent benchmark for any integrated class A amplifier. The new LECUA 1000WM (Luxman Electric Controlled Ultimate Attenuator) is the most advanced solution to volume regulation that has been introduced by Luxman so far. I already discussed the principle of the LECUA attenuation in the Audiodrom's review of the L-590AX and I will recap only briefly therefore: the setting of the VOLUME knob (irrespective if we do that physically or through the remote) is detected by sensors that activate a microprocessor controlled circuit that sets one of the thousands combinations of current switches to control the volume in the current domain. By doing this the LECUA volume control is not the function of impedance anymore so the frequency response and signal to noise ratio are uniform across the whole range of the volume – something that is not possible with standard resistor based attenuators. Another asset is that both channels are attenuated identically with no tracking errors and crosstalk consequently. The secondary effect is helpful after many years of using the Luxman amplifier – whereas standard volume controls tend to deteriorate (heard as cracking noise) the Luxman is free of it and this makes much easier to sell your old Luxman

lively fashion of modern fusion of country and retro feel that is partially induced by period recording equipment based on tubes.

The Luxman L-507uX's rendering of *Do You Love An Apple* was saturated with human warmth and richness, the tremolo of a guitar was emotionally charged and the decays took minutes to trail off. There is only a very few amplifiers that are capable of realistic portrayal of the trailing off notes yet this is exactly what makes the important difference between live and reproduced music. The amps that succeeded in doing so were mostly excellent designs operating in class A, some of them bearing the Luxman's logo on façade (L-590AX, L-550AII a M-600A). However, due to the limited power handling and high idle current consumption the A-class is not for everyone – in case you need to make alive a really big room or you have insensitive loudspeakers the power in the order of tens of watts is not enough. Though Luxman's amps can fluently switch into AB when the peak exceeds the A specifications there are customers that remain being scared off by the specified values. That is where class AB comes into the game. The issue is that many solid-state AB amplifiers are not capable of delivering that aura of events, the decays and the afterglow with which the last note lingers in air. The target of the L-507uX project was to make the blend of the class AB power and the sonic achievements of the Luxman L-590AX. By this Luxman arrives with a winning formula.

After reviewing several Luxman amplifiers in the past I did not expect the L-507uX to have any issues with accuracy of timbres – both voices in *The One I Love is Gone* were separated both spatially and timbrally, which is especially difficult here considering their similar tonal qualities. *The One I Love is Gone* (by the way, the song has simple yet beautiful lyrics) also introduces a deep resonating bass guitar into the mix that was thrown into my room with punch and drive – the L-507uX provided deep bottom-end extension, perhaps a tad deeper that was necessary. This favors to solid fundament of rock music or movie soundtracks, just be prepared for hearing the sounds that you previously did not know they are on the disc. The transparency of the L-507uX also mercilessly pointed out the hard microphone clipping that was audible on several occasions during the track. Actually, this is not bad, quite opposite as you can be sure that with the exception of the aforementioned afterglow the Luxman leaves no imprint on the music and let her pass through in a transparent manner.

On the stage...

I mostly auditioned the Luxman L-507uX in the LINE STRAIGHT mode that disables tone corrections. Should you need to compensate for speaker characteristics or room acoustics it is pretty okay to enable the treble (above 10kHz) or bass (below 100Hz) corrections as they have sensitive lift up to +/-8dB. Yet, the sound was audibly cleaner, dynamic and better contoured in the LINE STRAIGHT. But this is really dependent on the particular conditions in *your* listening room as the benefits of the corrected sound may easily overweight the purity. At night or at low listening levels do not be afraid to push the LOUDNESS button that improves physiology of bottom octaves – at 20dB level there is no sense in discussing fidelity, is there?

The Luxman continues in its tradition of holographic imaging. The soundstage is drawn with authority and realistic dimensions with no compression in depth or lateral or vertical

direction. It is apparent not only with large scale orchestral music but also with intimate blues numbers of Doug MacLeod – Doug’s Taylor guitar is clearly spatially distinct from the vocal of Claydene Jackson that comes from *standing* position from beyond Doug’s shoulders, the fingers that pluck the strings and those sliding the guitar’s neck as well as another fingers that tap a drum’s head are separate events in well-defined space and time and consequently successfully integrated into one big performance realism. This excellent recording is pure analogue on a two track tape recorder issued under Joe Harley’s supervision on Audioquest label (available on SACD AQ-SACD1046 so hurry up) and features full dynamics that was convincingly reproduced by the L-507uX. Though the dynamic contrast cannot be fully compared to those of the L-590AX I have no major quibble as long as I consider the price difference. Mark Knopfler’s voice in *We Can Get Wild (Kill to Get Crimson*, Warner Bros, 281 660-2) was projected a little bit forward into the room through Usher Dancer CP-8571 II Be speakers to be underlined with softly woven strings and embracing warmth of Guy Fletcher’s keyboards – you do not need much more than this to enjoy the music which I did in many evenings to come. However, later on the L-507uX surprised me once again - I was totally mesmerized by its ability to convincingly portray the *movements* of the heads of The Secret Sisters duo behind microphones which is something I hear very very rarely and definitely not at this price level.

1st interlude: the L-507uX is sensitive to interconnects. Not less not more than any other amplifier yet enough to enable further improving or fine tuning its sound to the listener’s preference. Initially I used Luxman’s own XLR signal cable that is decent, however unacceptable long term. When switching to Audioquest Colorado I experienced better dynamics, slight transparency shift and enhanced sense of detail – therefore I used the Colorado for the first part of this review. Now, there is yet another way how to get most out of the L-507uX...

From Colorado to Frankfurt

The Luxman L-507uX can respond to a transient signal quickly and without clipping, be it dynamically demanding peaks of Doug MacLeod’s guitar or the sharp defined attack of a drumstick against a kettle’s rim as heard in *Necessary Clothes*, which is a blues number covered from Howlin’Wolf’s repertoire. The transients spring out lightning fast to stay just for a moment before they harmoniously blend into the background. This perfectly illustrates Luxman’s philosophy of “... *reconstructing the sound that touches a listener deep in the heart, that decays and lingers in the aura of afterglow. That’s how Luxman differs from others...*”. I cannot but agree. In the real world of unamplified music are the absolute absence of electronic noise and the existence of full and clean dynamic attacks what separate it from any home playback. The rest can be simulated to certain extent – the naturalness not. The way the light is dying in the sky at the end of a day is not a discrete process – the dispersion, colors, tempo and clarity can be perhaps mimicked but not reinterpreted by any artificial means. Luxman tries to approximate the real life through those elements to come up with distinguishable sound that is very right and close to the life itself.

In case your room acoustics allow for turning the volume knob to the right, do this. The L-507uX does not care if you play soft or loud, there is no hint of alteration of sound ratios or dynamic constraints. Razor sharp and abrasive guitars of *Burning Hell* (Tom Jones, *Praise & Blame*, Lost Highway, B-001456-02) accompanied by a punchy kick drum have the power to tear down a wall or roll up a carpet when played *really* loud as well as the rhythmical mayhem of guitar licks and saxophones in *Devil's Party* (INXS, *Switch*, Epic, 82876 75189 2) make your feet stomp and adrenaline rush up in your head. There is no warning red light that would discourage the listener to soften the volume – quite opposite, the louder you play the more comfortable the L-507uX feels.

2nd interlude: I used Neyton's fantastic Frankfurt NF balanced interconnect for the rest of the listening. Why? Because it managed to transform the system – that is the combo of the L-507uX and the Luxman D-05 SACD player – into something very special, something that physically brings performers into the room. The sound acquired a completely different level of quality – actually the upgrade was like the replacing a lesser amp with a good amp.



Fingers of Rodrigo and Gabriela (*11:11*, PIAS/Rubyworks, 915 0170 022) can travel their guitars with neck-breaking speed through the L-507uX and though maybe not as palpable as I remember them through the L-590AX the sound glows with inner light and presence. With the Neyton I could almost see the reverberations in the air and the music just *flowed* through the room. The Secret Sisters brought a forty years old jukebox to my mind – not for the sound but for the atmosphere that was conveyed through the Luxman/Neyton system. If the investment into a good cable can elevate the performance to such a degree, there is point of no return afterwards.

Resumé

The character of the Luxman L-507uX favors the spectrum of a light bulb rather than that of a fluorescent tube. It provides very solid and deep bass fundament. It imposes very little of dynamical compression. It can unveil layers and details that were not heard before. Therefore it will need a good pair of speakers to shine.

I listened to the L-507uX (and also to its cheaper sibling L-505uX) through different sets of speakers – Sonus Faber Venere 2.5, Usher Dancer Mini Two Diamond, Usher Dancer Mini One Diamond, Usher Dancer CP-8571 II Be and Ayon Gyrfalcon. Each combination yielded different results. The Ayon Gyrfalcon is not expected to be a natural choice at its price tag of 16,000€ but I liked the combination, provided that your room is able to tame the low frequency waves that the combo can unleash. The Sonus Faber Venere 2.5 is not adequate either – these speakers are attractively voiced and when paired with a lesser amplifier they

can rock, but for the honesty of the L-507uX they appeared to be overly euphonic. Any of the Usher speakers were great compromise. I would be careful with the CP-8571's unless your room can support their bass output - the Dancer Mini series showed to be optimal for standard room sizes of around 20sqm. Both the Mini One and Mini Two boast of excellent Usher's DMD diamond tweeters that help further improve the delicacy of the highs of the L-507uX so in the end one can reach almost the class A presentation.

The L-507uX is a great looking amplifier that sound as good as it looks – that is great. Such synergy leaves many competitors behind. The relevant competition recruits McIntosh's brand new MA6700 or from Accuphase's E-360 and E-460 upgrades. Being all more expensive than the L-507uX none of the aforementioned amplifiers does not offer such a complex package – for example the European customer would buy the Accuphase E-460 for 25% premium *without* phono preamp. At the asking price of around 6,500€ the L-507uX aspires to the best buy in the category. Moreover, saving thousands euro can allow you to invest to a pair of interconnects or speaker cables – my experiments with the expensive yet efficient Neyton confirm that the wisely selected combination of the cable and the L-507uX can outperform an amplifier at perhaps even double the Luxman's price. I already mentioned that: the Luxman L-507uX is the winning formula.