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Luxman L-100 Centennial

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Before diving into Luxman's new L-100 Centennial integrated amplifier (\$11,995)—which marks the Japanese firm's 100th year in business—I did what any audio reviewer with a paper trail does: I read my past Luxman reportage.

May 2018: the L-509X integrated amplifier (\$9495), 120Wpc into 8 ohms, loaded with every imaginable sonic bell and whistle. My verdict: "One of the most intimate-sounding, dynamic, texturally nuanced, truthful purveyors of music of my experience. ... I could happily live with the Luxman L-509X till kingdom come."¹

February 2024: L-509Z (\$12,495), Luxman's reigning flagship, which took over my NYC digs like a happy houseguest. Same power specs as the 509X, kindred circuit topology, a beefed-up phono

stage, and 28 sculpted, honeycomb-meshed top-panel vents that glowed like sonic jewelry.²

The new L-100 Centennial uses similar design language and is in the same price neighborhood as its 509 siblings. There is overlap in their specification sheets. So is the L-100 a genuine centennial statement or just a 509 in a new suit?

I asked Luxman Head of Sales Izumi Saito to explain the differences between the L-100 and the L-509s X and Z. She started by explaining the company's design goals for the Centennial amplifier.

"For our 100th anniversary," Saito wrote in an email, "our

¹ See stereophile.com/content/luxman-l-509x-integrated-amplifier.

² See stereophile.com/content/luxman-l-509z-integrated-amplifier.

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Two-channel solid state integrated amplifier with 3 parallel-bipolar transistors, class-A output stage, with remote control. Inputs: 4 pair single-ended (RCA), 2 pair balanced (XLR) line; "Main In," (Pre In, RCA); phono, switchable MM, high/low, MC (RCA). Outputs, line: Pre Out (RCA); two pair loudspeaker output terminals. Input sensitivity/impedance: 180mV/47k ohms, single-ended line; 180mV/55k ohms, balanced line; 450mV/47k

ohms, Main In; 2.5mV/47k ohms, MM phono; 0.3mV/100 ohms, MC phono. Output power: 20Wpc into 8 ohms, 40Wpc into 4 ohms (both 13dBW). Frequency response, phono: 20Hz–20kHz (± 0.5 dB), line: 20Hz–100kHz (-3 dB). Tone control adjustment: bass: ± 8 dB at 100Hz, treble: ± 8 dB at 10kHz. THD: 0.005% or less (8 ohms, 1kHz); 0.015% or less (8 ohms, 20Hz to 20kHz). Output impedance: not specified. S/N ratio (IHF-A): Phono (MM):

80dB or more, phono (MC): 65dB or more, line: 98dB or more. Damping factor: 300. Power consumption: 260W, 210W (under no signal), 0.5W (standby).

Dimensions 17.32" (440mm) W $\times$ 7" (178mm) H $\times$ 17.87" (454mm) D. Weight: 56 lb (25.4kg). Supplied accessories: remote, power cord.

Serial number of unit reviewed 660300001. Manufactured in Japan.

Price \$11,995. Approximate number of dealers 71. Warranty: three years.

Manufacturer Luxman Corporation, 1-3-1 Shinyokohama, Kouhoku-ku, Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa 222-0033, Japan. Tel: (81) (0)45-470-6980. Web: luxman.com. US distributor: Rhythm Audio, 1330 Monte Vista Ave., Suite 6, Upland, CA 91786, USA. Email: hello@rhythmaudio.com. Tel: (909) 298-0770. Web: rhythmaudio.com.

absolute goal was to create an amplifier capable of bringing the life and emotion of music to the highest possible level. We received countless requests from passionate audiophiles around the world for a modern, pure class-A integrated amplifier that incorporates Luxman's latest technologies."

Those technologies include a new version of LIFES 1.1 (the latest Luxman Integrated Feedback Engine System), LECUA1000 (the latest Luxman Electronically Controlled Ultimate Attenuator), an output stage with Darlington bipolar transistors, a custom EI-core power transformer and custom filter capacitors, and Luxman's peel-coat circuit boards.

I asked Saito how these Luxman technologies and components differ in the L-100. "LIFES 1.1 combines the open, natural, and effortless sound often associated with non-feedback amplifiers with the low distortion and stability of conventional feedback amplifiers," Saito stated. "The circuit consists of three main stages: the main amplifier, an error amplifier, and a current-amplification stage. ... The open-loop gain is 29.3dB, while the closed-loop gain is 29.0dB. That means the actual amount of negative feedback is only about 0.3dB. Despite using almost no feedback, it delivers fundamental performance that matches—or even exceeds—that of conventional high-feedback amplifier designs."³

"For the new LIFES 1.1, we paralleled the input FETs (field effect transistors) in the error amplifier, redesigned the gain distribution throughout the circuit, and optimized the bias circuitry. These improvements further reduced distortion across the entire frequency range and improved the signal/noise ratio. The improvements are measurable: Total harmonic distortion at 1kHz was

reduced from 0.003% to 0.002%, at 100Hz from 0.002% to 0.001%, and at 20kHz from 0.007% to 0.006%."

I then asked how Luxman's familiar LECUA volume control changed in the L-100. For one, Luxman eliminated the pesky clicking sounds I recalled from its siblings.

"Our LECUA attenuator detects the exact moment when the audio signal passes through 0 volts—the zero-crossing point—and switches the attenuator only at that instant," Saito replied. "This allows volume changes to occur virtually silently. For the L-100, we developed a new countermeasure that suppresses and isolates even the extremely small noise generated by the zero-cross detection circuit itself. As a result, we've achieved an even higher level of signal purity."

As noted, the L-100 operates in class-A, 20Wpc into 8 ohms and 40Wpc into 4 ohms. In a chat, Randy Bingham of US importer-distributor Rhythm Audio told *Stereophile* that these are the class-A values—that its output power at clipping is considerably higher. Measurements should show how much higher. This implies that the L-100 is, strictly speaking, a class-AB amplifier heavily biased into class-A. Which, if true, says nothing bad about the device: Assuming it meets its output-power specs, it runs to 20Wpc into 8 ohms and 40Wpc into 4 ohms in pure class-A.

"By optimizing the rated output to 20Wpc, we were able to operate the output stage with a lower supply voltage," Saito explained. "This allowed us to design a highly efficient thermal management system that safely dissipates the heat of pure class-A operation

³ Presumably Saito is referring to measured performance, of the sort feedback tends to improve and that tends to look inferior in no- and low-feedback amplifiers.

MEASUREMENTS

I can now say emphatically that John Atkinson's measurements of audio equipment looked easy because he made it look that way, not because it was. We all came to expect that every month in *Stereophile*, we would be presented with countless accurate measurements of all manner of hi-fi equipment with little or no drama. I'm now on my third day of measurements, in the midst of a previously planned Palm Springs vacation, sweating over a dozen or more measurement subtleties that have made this review challenging.

I measured the Luxman L-100 Centen-

nial using a Prism Sound dScope III audio analyzer and a PicoScope 4824A USB oscilloscope. Prior to starting measurements, I preconditioned the amplifier for 30 minutes; the class-A idle dissipation is high enough that idle warm-up, with just a 1W signal to keep the automatic sleep function from triggering, was sufficient to reach operating temperature. I did not have my thermal camera handy for these measurements, but I can say that even the heatsink vents stayed within the temperature range where I could rest my hand on them comfortably.

The Luxman preserved absolute polarity

on all inputs, though the balanced inputs include a phase reversal switch for dealing with pin-3-hot vs pin-2-hot balanced sources. Volume adjustment was quite easy: The LECUA control adjusts in 88 steps of 1dB. Maximum gain in Line Straight mode (tone control bypass) to the speaker outputs was 43.6dB for unbalanced inputs, 37.5dB for balanced inputs. Gain at the headphone outputs was identical. Gain to the pre-outs was 14.5dB for unbalanced inputs, 8.4dB for balanced inputs.

The unbalanced line input impedance measured 46.9k ohms at 20Hz and 46.8k ohms at 1kHz, falling to 27.6k ohms at

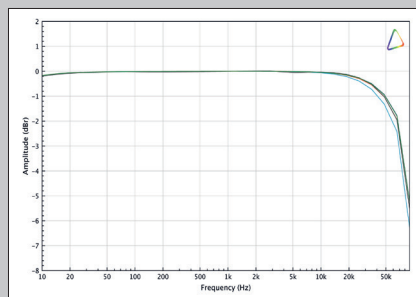


Fig.1 Frequency response at 2.83V into 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (red), 2 ohms (cyan), and the simulated loudspeaker load (grey), and repeated on 8 ohms at a midvolume setting (green); tone defeat engaged (0dB = 2.83V into 8 ohms at 1kHz, 1dB/vertical div.).

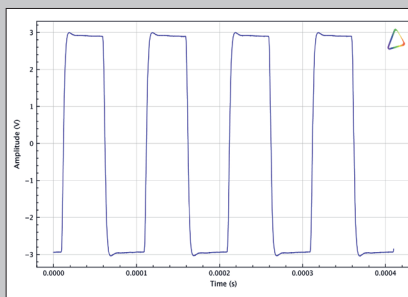


Fig.2 10kHz squarewave DUT output at 2.836V into 8 ohms (rise 4.02μs, fall 4.03μs, overshoot 1.6%).

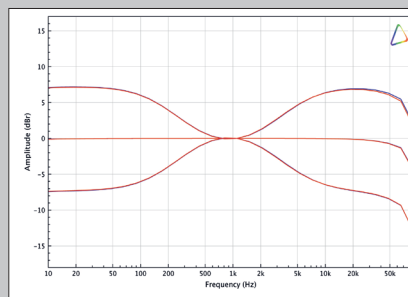


Fig.3 Response at 0.5W into 8 ohms with tone defeat engaged (flat), bass and treble at maximum boost, and bass and treble at maximum cut; left channel blue, right red (0dB = 2.00V at 1kHz, 5dB/vertical div.).

without requiring an enclosure as large as the L-509Z. We carefully balanced output power, operating voltage, and heat dissipation to achieve the ideal class-A performance in a more compact chassis.”

The custom EI-core transformer in the L-100’s power supply was developed jointly with Homerun Electric Co., Ltd. Its eight custom 10,000 μ F filter capacitors were manufactured for Luxman by Nippon Chemi-Con Corporation. “These are exactly the same premium-grade capacitors used in our flagship L-509Z, so there has been no compromise in the quality of the power supply,” Saito stated. “The L-100’s signal wiring uses custom-made oxygen-free copper (OFC) conductors without any plating. By avoiding plated surfaces, we preserve the most natural conductivity possible.”

Like the L-509Z, the L-100 uses a three-stage Darlington-connected bipolar transistor circuit, but here in a *quadruple*-parallel push-pull configuration. For the input stage,⁴ Luxman selected transistors from Isahaya Electronics, “known for their excellent low-noise characteristics,” Saito said. For the second stage and output stage, Toshiba transistors, “which offer strong current delivery and a very natural, honest sound quality,” were employed.

Like the earlier Luxman integrations, the L-100 uses peel-coat PCB technology for its circuit boards. Circuit boards’ copper traces are covered with a layer that insulates and resists solder. In the peel-coat process, this layer is selectively removed in the audio signal paths “to minimize the parasitic capacitance that can subtly affect sound quality.” “Peel-coat” sounds like a Farberware frying pan sales gimmick but reportedly has audible benefits.

Likely of more audible consequence is the quality of the boards

themselves. “The circuit board itself uses the same premium-grade glass-epoxy material as our flagship L-509Z,” Saito added, “but the copper trace layout has been designed completely from scratch and optimized specifically for the electrical characteristics of the L-100.” 100 μ m circuit-board traces lower resistance by 2/3 relative to the traces found on lower-quality boards. Luxman also rounds off sharp angles in its circuit-board traces. They say this practice was adopted “to achieve smooth signal transmission.” I don’t know if it helps, but it can’t hurt.

At \$11,995, the L-100 is priced just below the L-509Z. Were compromises made?

“Rather than investing in cosmetic luxuries, we simplified certain external elements,” Saito said. “For example, unlike the L-509Z, the L-100 does not use the very expensive custom-machined, Mount Fuji–inspired control knob. Instead, we redirected that budget into the internal components that have the greatest influence on sound quality. In other words, we chose to invest where listeners can actually hear the difference.

“For many years, Luxman used high-quality analog electronic switches because they offered the best balance of performance and sound quality,” Saito continued. “However, we finally found a relay that outperformed those analog switches in sonic performance. That allowed us to adopt relay switching throughout the L-100 without compromising signal purity.” The new relay switching

⁴ A Darlington transistor is two bipolar transistors connected so that the emitter of the first drives the base of the second, with both collectors tied together. The pair behaves as a single transistor, but since the current gains multiply, the current gain is very much higher. Disadvantages include doubling the base-emitter voltage drop and slower switching.

measurements, continued

20kHz. The balanced input measured 54.1k ohms differentially at 1kHz (27.1k ohms common mode), falling to 34.8k ohms at 20kHz.

The preamplifier output impedance measured around 692 ohms within 1%, 20–20kHz. The power amp input impedance was 48.9k ohms at 1kHz, increasing to 49.3k ohms at 20Hz and dropping to 19.9k ohms at 20kHz.

The headphone output impedance measured 819 ohms across the audioband. The power amplifier output impedance, estimated by comparing the voltage response at the speaker terminals under 100k ohm, 8 ohm, and 4 ohm loading, measured

0.028 ohms. This amplifier has a relatively high damping factor and will drive low-impedance speakers successfully.

The amplifier’s small-signal frequency response (fig.1) was essentially unchanged between 8, 4, and 2 ohm resistive loads and the simulated loudspeaker load. Note that for this plot, analyzer bandwidth was restricted to 90kHz, as the focus was on variation with load impedance. The analyzer’s 80kHz filter was enabled for this measurement; this was the cause of the observed rolloff. The audioband response changed by no more than 0.1dB between maximum and the midvolume position.

The 10kHz, 1W squarewave response

(fig.2) was well controlled. There was evidence of coupling between my source and output cabling, as the leading-edge overshoot changed with cable position, and the effect increased with the volume-control setting. Care should be taken to route source cables away from speaker output cables, and well-shielded interconnects should be used.

Channel balance (fig.3) in both Line Straight and tone-control boost/cut modes was excellent. Tone controls produced a maximum measured boost of 7.2dB and a maximum cut of 8.6dB. Channel separation was acceptable: At low frequencies, the unbalanced inputs reached 76dB of

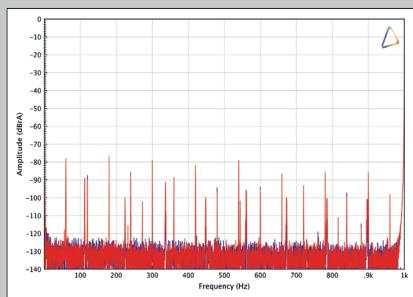


Fig.4 Spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1Wpc into 8 ohms, volume at maximum; left channel blue, right red (linear frequency scale, 0dB = 2.83V).

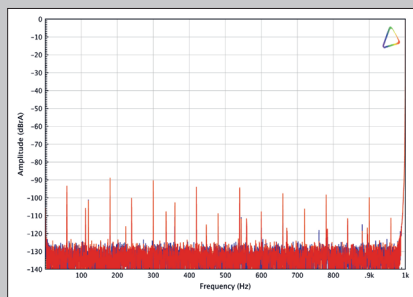


Fig.5 Spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1Wpc into 8 ohms, volume control at -20dB, input raised to hold 1Wpc; left channel blue, right red (linear frequency scale, 0dB = 2.83V).

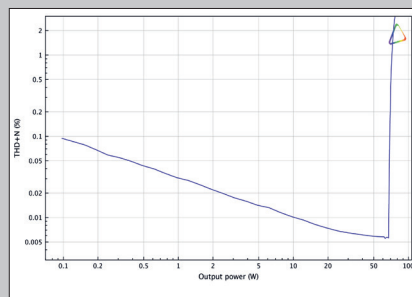


Fig.6 Distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms (clipping at 71.96W, 18.57dBW).

“contributes directly to a more vivid, energetic, and highly detailed musical presentation.

“In other words, while the L-100 offers a simpler user interface, the core analog performance remains very much flagship-level,” Saito insisted. “Listeners can enjoy the same high standard of analog playback, with outstanding musicality, low noise, and rich detail, without feeling that they’re compromising on sound quality.”

Of importance to me—since I evaluate components mainly via vinyl playback—the L-100’s MC/MM phono stage doesn’t cheap out. It is based on the same circuit architecture as the one in the L-509Z. The only functional difference, I was told, is that the L-100 lacks the L-509Z’s adjustable MC load resistance. Instead, Luxman optimized a fixed impedance value of 100 ohms, a decent match for most moving coil cartridges. It worked for me and mine.

The L-100 was developed by Luxman’s core engineering team: Masakazu Nagatsuma, who led the sound design; Kunihiko Koki, responsible for the electrical design; and Yasuhito Omori, who oversaw the mechanical design. Like all Luxman equipment, the L-100 was made in Japan. Luxman operates three production facilities located near its headquarters in Kanagawa Prefecture.

“Our high-end flagship products are not assembled on a mass-production line,” Saito wrote. “Instead, we use a cell production



system, where highly skilled master craftsmen build each unit by hand with exceptional precision. This highest level of production is handled by a carefully selected team of four specialists, who assemble, inspect, and fine-tune each unit one by one, with great care and pride.”

Now that we know what’s inside the

L-100, how about the cosmetics? The L-100 stands 17.3" wide, 7" high, and 17.9" deep and weighs 56 lb, though it felt heavier to my noisy knees. It features a 3mm-thick aluminum top panel with integrated polycarbonate ventilation panels for heat resistance and efficient airflow. The 5mm-thick extruded aluminum front and side panels have a fine, bead-blasted finish. The chassis combines 1.2mm baked-coated steel panels with 1.2mm black zinc-plated steel, creating a mechanically stable structure that minimizes unwanted vibration. “The choice of materials and the thickness of each panel were carefully optimized to achieve optimal vibration control,” Saito explained.

The high-quality parts array continues with precision-machined aluminum knobs, Shinohara Keiki Seisakusho VU meters, Emuden Musen Co., Ltd., RCA jacks, Neutrik XLRs, and Hong Kong-made MultiBiz speaker terminals. The L-100 includes the same remote control supplied with the L-507Z. It’s lightweight, fits my hand comfortably, and has highly legible controls and a power button. On the

measurements, continued

separation at 20Hz through 1kHz, dropping to 63dB at 10kHz and 51dB at 20kHz.

Low-frequency spectral measurements at 1W into 8 ohms (fig.4) showed the strongest identified supply-related spurs at -79.8dB in the left channel (300Hz) and -76.4dB in the right (180Hz), referred to the 1kHz fundamental. Reducing the volume by 19.9dB and increasing the input drive to restore the output reference level (fig.5) improved the spuriae levels by around 10dB.

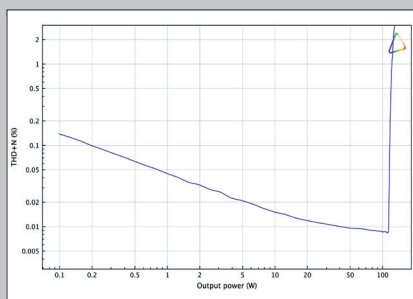


Fig.7 Distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms (clipping at 122W, 20.86dBW).

Comparing to the phono preamp measurements taken with shorting plugs and output isolation transformers revealed that the majority of the higher harmonic spuriae are from interactions between the analyzer and the amplifier, because they use different grounding schemes.

At the usual 1% THD+N criterion, the amplifier clipped at 72W into 8 ohms (18.57dBW; fig.6), and 122W into 4 ohms (17.86dBW; fig.7). At 8 ohms, the distortion minimum was 0.0087% at 51.3W.

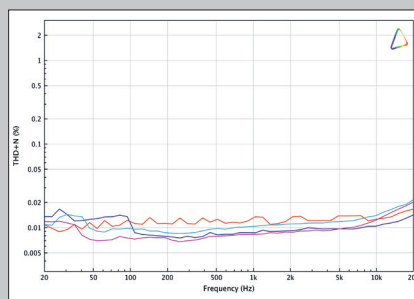


Fig.8 THD+N (%) vs frequency at 12.65V (20W into 8 ohms, operator selected), 192 kHz sampling, 80 kHz low-pass filter: 8 ohms left blue, right red; 4 ohms left cyan, right magenta.

I evaluated THD+N versus frequency at the rated class-A output power of 20W into 8 ohms and 40W into 4 ohms (fig.8). THD+N was very low throughout the audioband, suggesting that the L-100’s power amplifier has wide enough feedback bandwidth that there is very little phase shift through at least 40kHz. The worst recorded results were 0.0167% into 8 ohms and 0.0217% into 4 ohms; the latter occurred at 20kHz.

Looking at the distortion spectrum

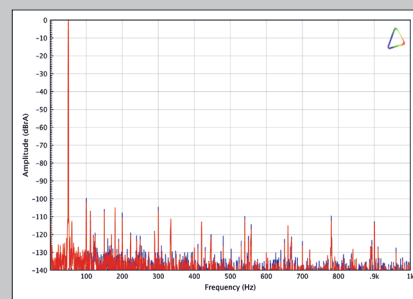


Fig.9 Spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 50W into 8 ohms (20V); left channel blue, right red (linear frequency scale, 0dB = the 50Hz fundamental).

other hand, the boxy design recalls a 1967 Magnavox TV remote.

Setup

Luxman includes what Art Dudley, in his review of the Luxman CL-1000 preamp, characterized as “an owner’s manual that suggests a manufacturer who gives a shit about the customer and who realizes that anyone who spends this much money on a single audio product might be presumed to have more than a passing interest in how the thing works.” Every Luxman manual I’ve read is clear and comprehensible. The L-100 manual was no exception.

I slid the portly L-100 onto a lower shelf of my Salamander rack so that it could mate with the J.Sikora Standard Max Supreme turntable on the top rack. Later, I put the L-100 on a sturdy wooden stool so that I could listen with my Thorens TD 124 turntable and its Korf TA-SF9R tonearm, which ended up getting most of the playing time.

The L-100 has a recommended break-in period of 150 hours, so I dug into my wall of dusty CDs and put two on repeat through my cheap’n’crusty Tascam CD player: the British library music compilation *The Sound Gallery Volume One* (Scamp SCP 9707-2) and Squarepusher’s drum-and-bass treatise *Feed Me Weird Things*

(Rephlex CAT037CD).

Cartridge-wise, two new moving coils—Ortofon’s MC X30 (\$779.99) and Sumiko’s Oriole (\$1699)—ran straight into the L-100’s phono stage. The L-100 exposed their differences gleefully: the X30 coherent, physical, no-nonsense; the Oriole spinning gossamer, exacting treble in a more romantic, seductive line.

Listening

I wanted to play some ear-shredding *rawk* through the Luxman. The Foo Fighters’ 2011 45rpm double album *Wasting Light* (LP, Roswell Records 88697 84493 1) provided a potent starting point. The album was recorded entirely analog, with eight hands on the faders for the final mix.

“I am no stranger to tape,” Dave Grohl told me in an interview for *Electronic Musician*. “Call me dumb, but the simple signal path of a microphone to a tape machine makes perfect sense to me.”⁵ Amen.

On “Bridge Burning,” the L-100’s 20 class-A watts drove the 90dB-

⁵ See foearchive.com/features/electronicmusician11.htm.

measurements, continued

(fig.9) of a 50Hz sinewave at 50W into 8 ohms, the second harmonic dominated, at -100dB (ref. the fundamental). All other harmonics were observed at lower, inaudible levels.

Looking at the 1kHz distortion residual at the 20W-rated class-A output power (fig.10), only wideband noise was visible, at a very low 0.035%.

With equal 19kHz and 20kHz tones, the 1kHz difference product (fig.11) lay at -99.7dB left and -100.7dB right (0.0010% and 0.0009%). The highest recorded third-order product was the 21kHz component at -90.6dB left, -91.0dB right (0.0030% and 0.0028%).

The phono section offered 50.3/50.2dB direct MM gain and 67.5/67.4dB direct MC gain, an additional 17.2-17.3dB in MC mode (this is measured at the Pre-out jacks). The MM load resistance was ~46k ohms up to 1kHz and 21.1k ohms at 20kHz; the fixed MC input load resistance was ~98

ohms across the audioband.

RIAA accuracy was good, and channel match was excellent (fig.12 for MM, fig.13 for MC). From 20Hz to 20kHz, the maximum MM errors were -0.47dB left and -0.34dB right, both at 20Hz, with a channel imbalance of just 0.02dB at 1kHz. (The rolloff seen in the figure is due to the analyzer’s internal filter.) The maximum MC errors were 0.31dB and 0.33dB, with an extremely low 0.08dB channel imbalance.

The moving magnet S/N ratio was 82.1dB wideband, 85.5dB A-weighted. The moving coil S/N ratio measured 63.8-65.0dB wideband and 70.6-71.4dB A-weighted.

Phono overload margins were among the highest I have ever measured: ~30dB in MM at 20Hz, 100Hz, and 1kHz, and 33dB in MC mode through 10kHz. At the remaining high-frequency measurement points, the analyzer generator reached my pre-determined safety limit before the phono

stage reached 1% THD+N, so the high-frequency margins may be even higher.

The strongest harmonic in MM mode (not shown) ranged from -99.8dB to -93.6dB. In MC mode, the strongest harmonic ranged from -97.7dB to -88.3dB. Phono intermodulation products were likewise low in both MM and MC modes (not shown), with the 1kHz product at -87.1dB in MM and -92.3dB in MC.

These measurements reveal the Luxman L-100 Centennial as a product designed with care in every technical aspect, with close channel matching even in equalized modes and across all volume settings and excellent overload margin in both phono and line-stage sections. The L-100 Centennial meets its class-A power ratings, with class-AB margin more than 3× higher. The damping factor is high enough to control speakers with low and widely varying impedance curves.—Dylan Wahl

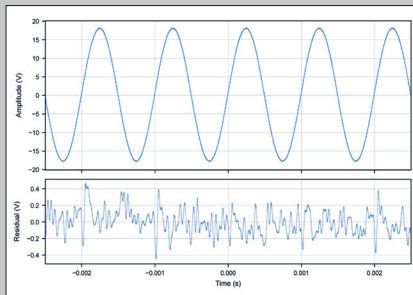


Fig.10 1kHz waveform at 20W into 8 ohms (top); distortion and noise residual (bottom); THD 0.0200%.

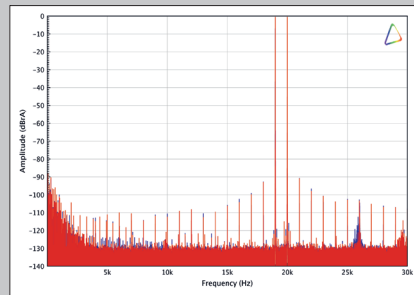


Fig.11 HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 1:1 at 30W peak into 8 ohms (7.746V per tone, 10.95V composite); left channel blue, right red (linear frequency scale, 0dB = the per-tone level).

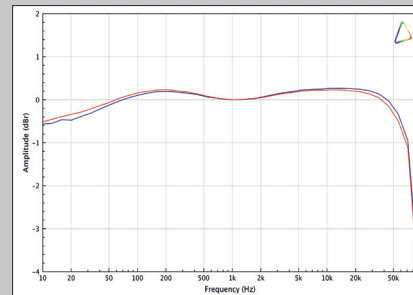


Fig.12 Phono input, MM mode, response error with inverse-RIAA pre-emphasis applied, volume 20.1dB below maximum (positioned live from the measured full-volume phono reference); left channel blue, right red (normalized to 0dB at 1kHz, 1dB/vertical div.).

sensitive DeVore Fidelity Super Nines like a call to war. The Foo's pummeling dual-guitar carnage, cannon-blast drums, and densely packed soundstage bristled with visceral attack. The L-100 (and the record player, the DeVores, and ancillary stuff) confronted me with a seamless wall of hard rock energy at 200mph. If the L-100 could crank rock with this much crunch and headroom (with the right speakers), I wondered what it would do with orchestral scale.

The Sumiko cartridge tore into *Boulez Conducts Varèse* with the New York Philharmonic (LP, Columbia Masterworks M 34552). This is a percussion jamboree apparently miked from the 25th row. Through the Luxman, it snapped with fast, crisp yet silky transients and tone that was chocolatey if dry. Rhythms criss-crossed as the amp mapped every inch of Manhattan Center's scale and depth. (Every Luxman I've reviewed has played with outstanding scale, layering, and separation, but the L-100 was better.) Notes flew like sunspots flaring off the sun—this thing is a PRaT king.

Whatever the genre, the L-100 lent music aliveness and speed, a sense that the music was present and palpable in the room.

True to its class-A lineage, the L-100 conveyed a sense of note purity and note flow, with a real sense of musicians engaged in space. The L-100 seemed to float images *into* the room, not simply between the speakers.

Jazz supergroup Bass Desires' debut (LP, ECM 1299) may date from 1986, but it still hits like a gut punch. Their take on Coltrane's "Resolution" is a cathartic blast of rhythmic risk and scalding interplay. The Luxman dug into the tune's small-studio intimacy while letting the big effects bloom: cathedral-length decay, seismic low end, crisp treble-to-midrange detail, and exacting resolution pushed to 11. Marc Johnson's acoustic bass hit with mass and articulation. Bill Frisell and John Scofield's twin guitars shrieked like baby monsters. Peter Erskine bruised everything within earshot. The soundstage was huge, 3D, and spatially stunning. The Luxman's speed, force, and acute tone locked into dramatic imaging and made untangling the music's complexity a breeze. Instruments occupied my room practically carved from space. I heard no smear or distortion. I *did* occasionally perceive what seemed to me an overtight grip, a slight mechanicalness compared to, say, the ease of a tubed class-A SET. That's picking a nit, if I'm honest.

I put on Frank Sinatra's *In the Wee Small Hours* (Capitol Records W 581). Frank's voice was utterly convincing and superbly intimate. Tones were pure. Images were visceral.

I put on the Oscar Peterson Trio + The Singers Unlimited's *In Tune* (LP, MPS Records MB 20905). Vocal layering was gorgeous. The music glowed with trippy explicitness.

Boards of Canada's *Inferno* (LP, Warp Records WARPLP496X) pumped hard and surrounded me, woozy atmospherics swirling with thick, weighty bass drum thuds underneath.

I changed directions, put on the Keith Jarrett Trio's "The Song Is You" from *Still Live* (LP, ECM 835 008-1). The Luxman gave refreshingly good insight into the trio's swing with clarity, grace, and gumption.

A mint second pressing of the Beatles' *Please Please Me* (LP, Parlophone PMC 1202) sucked me in with its crispness and low-end drive.

Intimacy. Separation. Deep bass. Musical flow and drive. The L-100 outplayed every memory I had of its Luxman siblings. It consistently delivered extended treble, a clear midrange with a touch of warmth, and deep bass that, while not as weighty and atmospheric as a good tube amp's, was always clear, taut, and punchy. Full-bodied and engaging, the L-100 brought exceptional layering, imaging, and speed, with a relentless sense of musical momentum and drive, while recovering subtle details in the wholeness of a large dimensional space. This is a landmark product for Luxman.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog sources Thorens TD 124 turntable with Korf TA-SF9R tonearm; J.Sikora Standard Max Supreme turntable. Cartridges: Sumiko Oriole, Ortofon MC X30.

Integrated amplifier Audio Note UK OTO Phono SE Signature.

Loudspeakers DeVore Fidelity Super Nine, Volti Audio Lucera, Voxativ Ampeggio 2025.

Cables Interconnects: Triode Wire Labs Spirit II (RCA). Speaker: Auditorium 23 (10').

Accessories Pro-ject VC-S2 ALU, HumminGuru record-cleaning machines; AOCISKA soft-bristle brush; AudioQuest PowerQuest 707 and IsoTek EVO3 Aquarius power conditioners; Salamander five-tier Archetype rack (2); Pangea audio rack; A/V RoomService Ltd. Equipment Vibration Protectors (EVPs).—Ken Micallef

The Luxman meets the Voxativ Ampeggio 2025s

The 94dB-sensitive Voxativ Ampeggio 2025 drew even more wonders from the L-100. Synergistic and dynamic, the speaker's single full-range 8" driver brought remarkable detail, crispness, bass density, and fullness from every record I played. It felt like moving from the fifth row to the first: Nuance and subtlety were amplified, served up with intimacy, palpability, and overflowing texture. Bass was less taut but more atmospheric.

The Luxman drives the Volti Audio Lucera

Considering the Volti's 99dB sensitivity, with a 15" woofer, and its horn-loaded tweeter and midrange driver, you'd expect the Lucera and the Luxman to hit it off, and they did. The Lucera cozier up to the Luxman like two peas in a pod. The soundfield was enormous; the Luxman fully engaged the horns to reveal even more of its silken treble. The midrange became a mite gummy, while the bass grew big enough to swallow me whole. Synergy, indeed.

Compared with the Audio Note UK OTO Phono SE Signature

In for review, this classic Audio Note SE integrated amplifier puts out 10Wpc in class-A with four EL84 tubes, Audio Note copper-foil capacitors, 1W Nichrome resistors, and Kaisei electrolytic capacitors.

The Audio Note played with more loose-limbed swagger, more continuity and flow, and an even greater sense of musicians inhabiting space, of music blooming into the room. It did what good tube amps do. But it couldn't match the Luxman's grand soundstage: Notes were slightly smeared. Imaging was more diffuse. The Audio Note also lacks the Luxman's dual binding posts, remote, MC phono input, tone controls, Line Direct and Loudness functions, and ran just 10Wpc to the Luxman's 20.

Summing up

Eleven thousand, nine hundred and ninety-five dollars is a lot of money. Who's the customer for this expensive integrated amplifier from a legacy Japanese brand? I'd say it's built for longtime Luxman devotees—those who love the house sound, the impressive layering and separation, grand soundstages, and dynamic splendor. It's also for listeners who prefer solid state to tube amplification, since this is very much the former. Its mountain of controls, including tone controls about which I've said little, is a selling point in its own right. The L-100's attributes are many, its faults practically nonexistent. It's the best Luxman I've heard, a long stride beyond the SQ-N150 integrated I raved over in 2019, an all-tube product that shook me. It's Luxman's celebration of 100 years and the latest, greatest evolution of the 509 series. It comes very highly recommended. ■