

Luphonic H2 turntable

Chris Frankland

German turntable brand Luphonic is a relatively recent arrival on the hi-fi scene. It was established by Thomas Luh in early 2020, just four weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

What drove him to take this bold step at such a challenging time was his desire to realise his ideas and offer the market new products with an attractive price/performance ratio. On its website, Luphonic explains how Luh wanted to make products “free from dogma and clichés” in terms of form factor and the materials used, which Luphonic says are chosen based on technical merit rather than being an end in themselves.

Reflecting philosophy

The H1 and H2 models reflect that philosophy with their interesting mix of materials and H-shaped chassis. They were Luphonic’s first products to market, launched at the Munich High-End Show in 2022.

The entry-level H1 has a lightweight but stiff (460g) high-pressure-laminated foam (HPL) chassis. The H2 has a three-layer chassis, which sandwich a vibration-damping rubber layer between two layers of the solid surface material Corian. You may have seen this material used for kitchen worktops. It uses natural minerals mixed with an acrylic polymer.

The H2 is priced at £3,950, while the H1 is £2,900. Auden in the UK supplies both with an Audiomica Henat 1m interconnect cable worth over £700. The H2 has two phono output sockets on the chassis so the user can change or upgrade the cable. Above the H models sit the R2 at £4250, introduced at Munich this year, and the R3 at £4750, launched at the event in 2023. Fitted with the 9.5in K2 tonearm, the R3 retails for £5550, with the 12in K2 arm it will set you back £5750, and without any arm, its £4750. The R models are not H-shaped and have a more conventional rectangular chassis. The R2, like the H2, has a Corian/rubber/Corian construction, while the R3 has three layers of Corian and two layers of cellular rubber. >>



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
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» But why Corian? I asked Thomas Luh, who explained that he chose it because of its high density and low resonances and vibrations. It can also be highly polished for a durable, attractive finish and easily crafted into any shape. It also uses Corian for the turntable platter.

Layered construction

The sandwich construction minimises disturbances and interference to the arm/cartridge from motor vibrations or footfall in the room. The AC synchronous motor itself is attached to the lower layer of Corian. At the same time, the arm/cartridge fixes to the top layer with an isolating layer of cellular rubber between the two. The motor control circuitry sits in a metal housing attached to the lower layer.

The H2 was admirably resistant to any disturbance from my heavy-footed progress across the rather bouncy floor in my living room. The turntable is belt-driven, with the main Corian platter on an aluminium subplatter and a captive steel spindle running on a ceramic ball bearing. The whole thing sits on four POM (polyoxymethylene) thermoplastic feet.

An unusual aspect of the H2 is how you change speed. It offers both 33rpm and 45rpm, selectable using a separate circular 'puck' that is white on one side and

black on the other. When you turn the H2 on, the display built into the Corian chassis (Corian is translucent and can be backlit) will show the H2, followed by the version of the installed software. To start the platter rotating, you place the puck on the white illuminated circle – black side uppermost for 33rpm and white side up for 45rpm. Moving the puck off the white marker will stop the turntable. The puck system also appears on the R2 and R3. Make sure you keep that puck in a safe place, though. Without it, you won't play any albums until you order a new one for the princely sum of £20.

All Luphonic turntables are designed and made in-house in its German factory, as is the K2 tonearm. It has a gimbal bearing and a carbon fibre arm tube, which Luphonic says it chose because of its low resonances and 'tonal strengths'. The headshell construction features a sintered polyamide filled with tiny glass spheres. The bearing housing is anodised aluminium. The K2 is suitable for cartridges weighing between 5g and 14g. Height adjustment (VTA) can be achieved by loosening the retaining bolts in the base and raising or lowering the arm. At the same time, it is also possible to adjust the angle of the headshell so it sits parallel to the record surface.



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» Auden Distribution supplied the review sample pre-fitted with a high-end moving magnet VM760SLC cartridge from Audio Technica. However, the turntable comes without a cartridge as standard. I left the VM760SLC in for my listening, as it is actually a very good cartridge.

Good mover

To listen to the H2, I hooked it up to an Avid Accent integrated amplifier, which has an excellent phono stage. I used two sets of speakers during my listening – the Russell K. Red 120Se and Audio Note's AN-J LX Hemp.

I sat down for some brief initial impressions before starting my protracted evaluations. The H2 had good inner detail and tonality on the guitar and saxophone, letting you hear the interplay between the musicians exceptionally well. The sound had great pace and agility. Bass lines really moved, and the H2 enthusiastically conveyed the spirited drum play, which let the music move and flow.

The Luphonic spurred me on to try some of my favourite tracks, and the first I reached for was 'No One Emotion' from George Benson's superb *20/20* album. This track really motors along at a blistering tempo, and the H2 captured the energy and dynamics of the track well, with a good grip on the bass line that drives the track. Benson's vocals were open and articulate, while drums and percussion were crisp and detailed, which again helped the track gel rhythmically. And that breathtakingly brilliant electric guitar solo from Michael Sembello had the bite and presence it should have but without any glare or harshness.

I never knew Canadian singer/songwriter/guitarist Stephen Fearing before Rega recorded an album with him. If you do not know him, I strongly recommend you check him out. His superbly recorded album with Rega, *The Secret of Climbing*, is a great place to start. It was simply recorded with two mics and no mucking about in post-production.

On my favourite track from that album, 'Red Lights in the Rain', the H2 captured his vocal's power, range, emotion and character very well, not cramping his style whenever he really let rip on a note. The same is true for how the H2 captured the essence of his lovely custom Manzer Cowpoke acoustic guitar, with good insight into how he was playing and shaping each note, his fingers sliding on the strings, and the body and weight of the instrument.

Contrasting that very pure acoustic sound, the H2 also shone when I played 'Jack and Diane' from John Cougar's (a.k.a. John Cougar Mellencamp) *American Fool* album.

This song has a very upfront, dynamic guitar and drum sound, which suits the rocky feel of the song. The H2 handled it with a great sense of dynamics, energy, and power and captured Cougar's vocal style well.

An album that will blow your socks off is *Double Vision*, the superb collaboration between keyboard ace Bob James and sax legend David Sanborn. The bass line from Marcus Miller on the opening track, *Maputo*, is exceptionally powerful and tight and drives the number along, and the H2 handled that with verve and vigour. James's keyboards were nicely highlighted and not lost in the mix while ably rendering Sanborn's epic power and skilful technique on sax.

Impressive performance

Turning in an equally impressive performance on 'The Girl from Ipanema' from the *Joao Gilberto/Stan Getz* album and rocking along on ZZ Top's 'Gimme All Your Lovin', the H2 took it all in its stride and when I compared it with a couple of well-respected competitors at a similar price, the H2 more than held its own.

The Luphonic is an excellent buy at the price. It is impressively well made, sounds great, and is nicely finished. If you are in the market for a turntable at this price level, it would be a mistake not to put the H2 on your shortlist. I highly recommend it. +

Technical specifications

Type: Belt-driven turntable with AC synchronous motor controlled by microprocessor

Speeds: 33rpm and 45rpm, electronically selectable

Chassis: Corian solid surface material sandwiched with cellular rubber

Speed accuracy: 0.04% WRMS DIN

Platter: Corian

Tonearm: 9.5in K2 arm with gimbal bearing, carbon fibre arm tube and polyamide headshell filled with glass spheres

Arm lead supplied: Audiomica Henat 1m

Dimensions (HxWxD): 140mm x 440mm x 360mm

Weight: 6.9kg

Price: £3,950, €3,490, no US distribution at the time of writing

Manufacturer Luphonic Labs GmbH  www.luphonic.de

UK distributor Auden Distribution

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