



PONTE VECCHIO LUSSO 1

A Closer Look



The details were correct at the time of writing, but the manufacturer and Bella Barista reserve the right to change the technical specification of the packaging, machines and any accessories supplied with the machine (including quantity and type of accessories supplied)

Overview

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 arrived very well packed in a sturdy cardboard box, because the machine is not too heavy it is unlikely to get damaged in transit. Externally the machine is fairly well finished in chrome plated steel and polished stainless, it uses good quality components in its construction. The warmer tray is a reasonable size and sufficient for the capacity of the machine. The machine has a compact design and will fit in even the smallest kitchen or dining room. The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 is quiet when operating, due to the complete absence of motors and pumps.

This type of machine internally, is extremely simple and there are few things to go wrong, this simplicity is also mirrored in the operation of the machine. There are few controls and no need to do anything special to draw steam, hot water or espresso at any time (apart from filling the water tank occasionally). The Ponte Vecchio does not automatically monitor the level of water in the tank and if run too low on water (e.g. a steam valve or water tap is left slightly open) will actually cause a safety trip switch to operate, preventing damage to the heating element. A call to Bella Barista before resetting this yourself would be advisable, as case removal is necessary to reset this switch.

The drip tray is small but because cooling flushes are not required (as with some machines) and any post espresso cleaning flush should be into a container, doesn't cause too much of a problem although it's important to keep an eye on the liquid levels in the drip tray.

The portafilter is an odd 48mm size and has built in twin spouts, and holds both a single or double basket; it is also reasonably heavy for its size! The supplied plastic tamper can only be described as poor, one end doesn't fit and the other end fits, but is far too small. This left me searching the house for anything that I could use as a tamper. I think I could have achieved even better espressos with a decent metal tamper that fitted properly.

The 3 litre internal boiler is a good size and would be enough for a whole day of use in the average household (assuming you were not using it to draw hot water). It's an extremely strong steamer, steaming 400ml of 5c water to 60c in 45 sec and this performance is only equalled by the Andreja Premium. The steam wand has 3 holes, but because these are small, it is easy to micro-foam large or small quantities of milk.

There are a few minor changes that could usefully be done, without compromising reliability and it is clear the machine has been designed to deliver a good value for money/price balance. This does not mean it will not be reliable or long lasting; in fact the very simplicity of the machine is likely to make it extremely reliable. As long as basic seals and gasket maintenance is performed, it will have a very long service life. Servicing will be easy (partly because there is so little to service), the case is easy to remove all components are very accessible and replacement of any component is straightforward. The piston seals within the lever assembly are always a point of concern with this type of machine and I understand Bella Barista will be offering 2 options.

1. A £49 service that includes return p&p and will replace the seals, gaskets and shower screen in the group.
2. Using the engineering instructions they will be posting on the website for replacement of all the group seals and gaskets. This is a process that will only take around 15 minutes and all the parts (including shower screen and group gasket) will apparently cost far less than £10

In summary; The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 is good value for money lever machine. It's relatively easy for the domestic consumer to use and easy for the reseller to support and maintain. It should provide many years of reliable service with a minimum of maintenance.

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How it arrived and unpacking



Sturdy box, packaging obviously specifically designed for the machine. It is easy to get the machine out of the box as plenty of room at the sides and the machine is not heavy. The Ponte Vecchio came with a manufacturer's manual that is of the usual poor standard common with these machines. It only covers the basics of machine operation and a very brief description of how to make coffee. The UK Bella Barista guide will prove to be of significant help to the novice user.

The corner positioning of Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 is ideal, especially when located near a sink. Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice and does not dominate on standard sized work surface. Its compact size (and low weight) does allow you to place it in a variety of locations, or even temporarily site it in a dining room if entertaining. Refilling the water tank involves removing the cup warmer tray and unscrewing the boiler cap, a funnel is supplied to aid filling the machine.



Flushing the machine before 1st use

This is important with any machine and the procedure for this is included in the Bella barista user guide. It is never a good idea to use a machine without thoroughly flushing it through, especially considering that the machine may have stale water from factory testing (many months old), or manufacturing residues.

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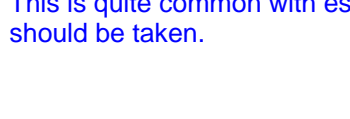

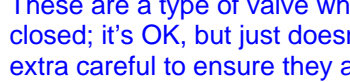

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Inside the Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1

Internal build quality is good with good quality components. Components are well positioned and neatly assembled.

Servicing this machine will be very easy; strip down is fast and simple with little potential for error. Component quality is good and there is with easy access to all internal components.


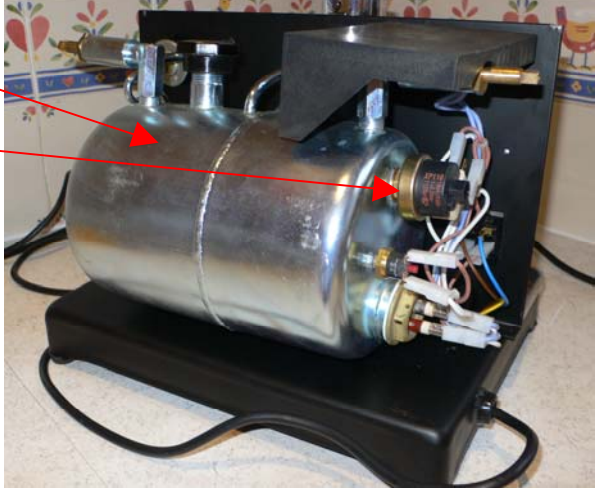
Key features


Item/Description	Picture	Comments
My usual pet hate, the ubiquitous plastic label		I don't want a steel machine with a plastic label. I want a metal badge!
After case removal some sharp edges can be exposed.		This is quite common with espresso machines and care should be taken.
Water and steam knobs are not attractive		They could be improved by finishing off with a chromed end cap to hide the screws.
Water and steam knobs have to be closed very tightly to prevent dripping		These are a type of valve which does need to be tightly closed; it's OK, but just doesn't feel good. You need to be extra careful to ensure they are properly closed.
The pressure gauge looks out of place		A more normal chrome bezel pressure gauge actually calibrated in bar would be far more suitable. This gauge just looks...wrong!

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<p>The drip tray is a little small</p>		<p>This should have been pressed out around 1-2cm deeper.</p>
<p>The inner baskets of the portafilter tend to drop out, especially bad with the double. The spring clip (wire) inside the portafilter holder is poorly tempered. This mean it is elastic and deforms rather than springing back to its original position</p>	<p>The spring clip (wire) inside the portafilter holder is poorly tempered. This mean it is elastic and deforms rather than springing back to its original position. As I write this PV are already modifying these with a different tempering process.</p>	
<p>Drawing water from the machine is a risky proposition that isn't really feasible. Use of a kettle is highly recommended</p>	<p>It jets out quite vigorously and splashes. The water wand really needs a good diffuser on the bottom and a wider bore tube.</p>	
<p>Removing the outer case is easy</p>	<p>There are about 2 bolts underneath the machine and 2 screws under the steam and water taps to remove.</p>	
<p>The internal components were high quality. Nicely made Nickel Plated Brass boiler.</p> <p>Quality MA-TER XP110 pressurestat</p> <p>All metal fittings</p>		<p>There are not many of them, but nice to see the quality is good, except for the steam/water valves, which may be good quality, but have a poor quality feel.</p> <p>Pressurestat is quite accurate and easily obtainable.</p>
<p>The machines light weight and small footprint.</p>	<p>make it ideal to move freely around the house and it will blend in with a number of environments e.g. moving to the dining room if entertaining, for after dinner coffees</p>	
<p>The sheer simplicity of the design</p>	<p>There is really very little to go wrong, not much to fiddle with or adjust. It's also the sort of machine that if used in a holiday home, won't have problems with long periods of disuse.</p>	
<p>The "theatre" of making coffee</p>	<p>It's small enough (and quiet) that you could easily move it into a dining room for doing after dinner coffees. The machine when not being used is quiet. The actual making of the coffee looks impressive using a lever.</p>	

<p>Easy to maintain Lever part of group. You might think that the inside of the lever group will be a real problem to maintain. Replacing seals etc.</p> <p>The procedure to do this will be published on the Bella Barista Web site.</p>	<p>It's actually very easy indeed taking only 10 mins to replace all the seals and requires no specialist tools, only the sort of tools any DIY'er would have to hand. There are very few seals to actually replace and I understand an entire kit including shower screen, group gasket and the internal seals will only cost a few pounds! Bella Barista will also be offering this as part of a machine service inc return P&P at a very attractive price.</p>	
<p>The boiler sight glass is great, you always know how much you have left.</p>	<p>It certainly ensures you're not in the middle of an espresso, or steaming milk and suddenly the machine cuts out as in the more expensive HX machines.</p>	
<p>Very Strong Steamer, a Cappuccino lovers delight!</p>	<p>Steamed 400 ml of water at around 5c to 60c in around 45 seconds. Fantastic steaming performance (professional steaming ability). It's also easy to micro-foam large, or small milk volumes and easy for the inexperienced user. The main trick is not too open the tap to quickly and for smaller milk volumes not to open it all the way. I was able at my first attempt to get good micro-foam.</p>	
<p>Portafilter although small, is actually quite heavy for its size.</p>	<p>They worked quite well and did the job they were supposed to, the smaller handle does make it feel as if you have to use more force to lock it in though</p>	
<p>Nice and quiet</p>	<p>If you like your machines quiet, they don't come any better than this!</p>	
<p>The review Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 was running at average of 1.75 bar. A little high and I lowered it to around 1.3 to 1.4 bar.</p>	<p>The machine would be quite forgiving to reasonably wide pressure variations and would be fine running at anything from 1.2 to around 1.5 bar.</p>	
<p>Good sized cup warming tray</p>		<p>For such a small machine, plenty of room to keep the cups nice and warm</p>

Picture gallery



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Temperature and Pressure Issues

A few important things about this machine, that are significantly different to some other lever machines and comments you may read on the Internet about other similar lever machines (in italics).

“After 4 espressos the machine just became too hot”

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 can cope with continuous espressos until the boiler is empty and the temperature remains almost constant from the 1st to the 20th (or last) espresso

“You can’t leave these lever machines on for very long, they overheat”

Although I always advise that if a coffee machine is not going to be used for a few hours you should turn it off. The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 can be left on all day and does not overheat.

“Risk of the machine falling over or burning you on the exposed boiler”

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 is quite a stable platform for operation of the lever and as the boiler is enclosed within a chrome and steel case, there is little risk of burning yourself

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 runs hot, as of course the pressure of the water in the boiler is around 1.4 bar and its temperature around 126 c. The group does have a thermosyphon effect to keep it warm, but only warm enough to not cool the brew water below optimum brewing temperature. One key function of this group is to bring the temperature of the very hot boiler water down to around 92-94c. However, the longer the water is in the group, the cooler it gets! So a 7 second wait after pulling down the lever and a correct grind for a pour at the right speed are essential factors in getting your espresso right.

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 requires no flush of any kind prior to pulling all shots (**except the first shot of the day**) In some respects this is quite a relief and means you don't have to fill the machine as often as you might think. I had the machine on and making coffees all day and would possibly fill it once. For my bigger HX machine and the same usage I would have filled the 3 litre cold water tank 3 or more times!

Please note that your machine will be thoroughly inspected by Bella Barista prior to delivery and they will already have ensured that the machine is operating correctly and boiler pressure adjusted if necessary.

Pressure adjustment can be done by the home user on some machines, but we recommend not attempting this yourself. Please give us a call first as it may be unnecessary.

Damage as result of incorrect adjustment will not be covered under warranty (please note correct temperature measurement of brew water is a skilled task, requiring experience and the correct equipment). Also without simulating correct pressures and pour rates within the Portafilter of the Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1, you cannot measure temperature correctly.

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Final Thoughts

This is the first lever machine I have properly used. I have briefly tried a few other types/brands many years ago and was not particularly impressed. The spring lever mechanism is great, because it removes none of the skill, but does remove all of the risks of damaging the seals by pulling too hard and the variations in pressure during the shot. This forces you to use the correct methods of regulating your shot...the grind of the coffee!

My closer look picked up a few things I would definitely like to see improved. I don't think this particular machine will ever become a spring lever class leader, but certainly forms a good entry level machine, **at a good price point and offers value for money!** It is a good quality machine that will last a lifetime if well maintained and carefully used.

Espresso

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 makes reasonably good espressos. Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be no problem with this machine.

Steam Production

The Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1 is a very, very strong steamer (the strongest of any machine tested so far!). The steam wand is well designed and the 3 holes are not too large. The milk swirls easily you can get good quantities of micro-foam before the milk overheats. You will have no problems producing copious amounts of micro-foam and with very little practice as the machine is quite forgiving. Plenty of nice dry steam, a real strength in this area

Hot Water

I personally wouldn't recommend to anyone to use the machine for hot water. This aspect of its operation is in need of some improvement as it's a very vigorous and risky experience.

Many of the parts are standard and for those that are not, they are not expensive. Servicing and part availability should not be a major issue for the owner (I notice many other makes of lever machines use the same parts).

The bottom line is you really could be paying far more for a spring lever machine and when I searched on the internet at the time of writing this article: in some other countries (e.g. USA) this same machine is significantly more expensive than here in the UK.

The decision to buy a lever machine is not one many people make, but for those who do, it is important they get the right machine. This machine will make all the different coffee drinks quite capably but it does take a little time to master. **It is important to understand that you will need time and practice, to get the very best out of the Ponte Vecchio Lusso 1**

Important Note: Although it does not require a great deal of strength to operate the lever mechanism, this machine would not be suitable for someone who had arthritis or any form of weakness in the arms/hands.

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