

Meridian's classy 504 tuner's a real smoothie

Meridian 504

Tuner £595

For Fine, smooth, grown-up sound; immensely flexible

Against Accessing some facilities is fiddly; that's it

Verdict ★★★★★

In the Meridian tradition of easily-understood, great-sounding hi-fi, the 504 tuner's an ideal complement to the company's 500 Series CD players and amplification

Meridian 0480 52144

The Meridian 504 FM tuner is classy in its glass-topped casework, sounds really rather good, and is very simple to use. Switch on and you have up/down seek tuning, the choice of 30 presets, a mono button and selector to toggle the display between a frequency, display off, centre tuning/signal strength and station name.

But as with all Meridian products, all is not what it seems. That station name facility should be a clue, since there seems to be no way of changing the name assigned to a particular preset.

Read the manual – with Meridian products, it's the only way you'll find out what they can really do – and you'll find that pressing one of a couple of keys while turning the tuner on will access a whole raft of further set-up and user options. You can read about those in the panel on this page, but suffice it to say there's more to the 504 than meets the eye.

More obvious is the way it sounds, which puts it into a very select elite occupied by the likes of Naim's tuners, the Audiolab 8000T, Mission's Cyrus FM7 and the Rotel RT990BX. For while the 504 lacks the ultra-explicit, 'almost too good for the broadcasts' presentation of the 8000T or the Naim NAT02, its warmer, sound is perfectly suited for relaxed listening, without being so smooth that your attention wanders.

Select a Radio 3 live concert and the Meridian delivers a weighty, full-scale impression of the orchestral forces, with a deliciously generous view of double basses and timpani. But set against this is a more than adequate

amount of detail in the midrange and treble, giving strings and brass excellent timbre. Soundstaging is excellent, too.

With Radio 4, the Meridian is explicit enough to make unravelling heated discussions easy. Voices occasionally sound a little over-warm, especially lighter-toned female speakers, but the 504 is consistently involving, and gives a good sense of the size of the studio, and where the participants are positioned within the room.

Turn to Radio 1 and you can never forget that the famous 'make it all more exciting' compressor's in action, but the Meridian treats the processed signal with more sympathy than, say, the ruthlessly revealing Audiolab, the bass weight of the tuner helping tame some of the sharper edges.

The Meridian 504 is a very fine tuner by any standards. It's very demanding of the aerial with which it's used, needing plenty of signal to do its stuff, but treat it right and you've a device with an appeal far beyond inclusion in all-Meridian set-ups.

HIDDEN ASSETS

Turn the 504 off, then power it up holding down the mono button, and you access its set-up options. This allows you to switch from seek tuning to manual tuning, in 5kHz steps, choose the signal strength at which the seek tuning will stop on a station, and turn the signal meter on and off. You can also define the maximum number of presets – 30 are available, but if you have fewer stored, you can set it to ignore those not in use.

Repeat this procedure, holding down the store button, and you can input station names of up to eight characters for each preset – Radio 1, Classic, Forth and so on. Default labels are set up in manufacture, but these can be altered.

The 504 also has Meridian's comms socketry on the rear, allowing it to be hooked up to other items in the company's range for complete system control from a single remote handset.



Meridian 504 may look refreshingly simple, but user options allow it to be configured to suit your listening habits