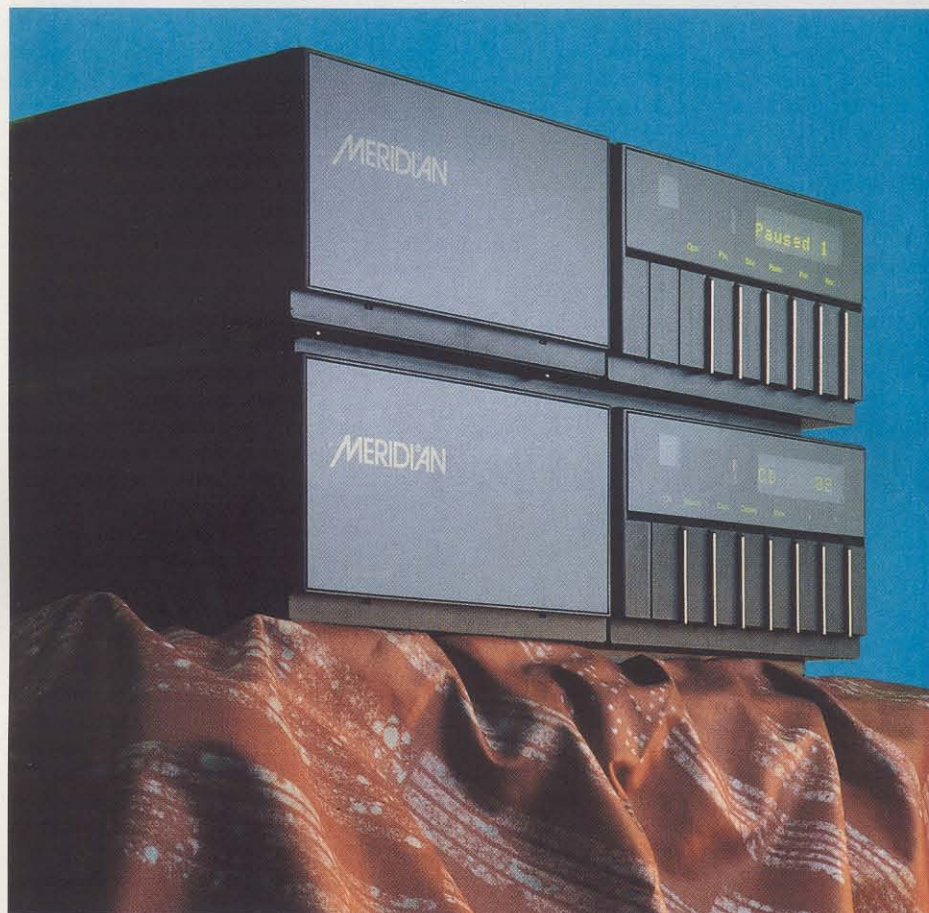


# World's Most Exciting Hi-fi

## MERIDIAN 602/606

**£3100**

Hi-tech looks and hi-fi performance go hand in hand with Meridian's 600 range of CD players and D to A converters



**M**eridian is a company that likes BitStream. It has found success with its mid-price 200 series, in which the curving aesthetics and matt minimalism of preceding Meridian wares finally found a successful alliance. It sounded good too.

The 600 series goes further, costs more, and should sound even better. It's an ambitious concept – a range of components that can be used in a number of distinct configurations. They can operate as stand-alone components in conventional high fidelity systems, or can combine as a true active system with 'digital' loudspeakers such as the D600 which has on-board D/A converters, power amps, electronic crossovers and so on. Finally, 600 series components can be used in multi-room installations.

The 602 is a CD transport; the 606 is a digital-to-analogue converter capable of accepting the 602's output, along with the digital feeds from other digital sources. Both units are constructed from two individually screened sections bolted together externally. On the left of the 602 transport is a drawer mechanism, plus power supply components. The logic and control circuitry is screened off in its own separate box on the right hand side. Similar demarcation is used in the 606 DAC where the analogue circuitry is kept well apart from the power supplies and digital areas.

An expensive player, the 602/606 ought to sound better than those players Meridian has produced in the past. It does, but that doesn't make the results particularly easy to describe. It's difficult to get to grips with a verbal description of the combination's sound, not least because so many of its virtues are best stated as negatives. Thus it sounds uncoloured and unprocessed, almost to the point of being self-effacing. The colourless quality of the Meridian is no bad thing. If the sound of a high fidelity component is too easy to describe, it implies a readily-identifiable personality, precisely what should be avoided.

This is a quality the Meridian shares with other BitStream implementations. However, the 602/606 breaks the mould by achieving this without the fatal loss of definition and the compression that is evident with so many BitStream players. Nor does it exhibit the hard, unyielding quality that characterises others. Those players usually offer in recompense very fine resolution of low level signals, down to the threshold of hearing in many cases. We didn't hope to find much of an improvement here, but again the Meridian managed to exceed all expectations. Its resolution of fine detail proved to be among the best we've heard.

Over a fairly continuous listening period of two months, the duo was used with a wide range of ancillary equipment, including Martin Logan Sequel II speakers, DNM/Musical Fidelity and Audio Research

LS-1/Classic 60 amplifier combinations and a Krell pairing. The amps were used to drive Monitor Audio Studio 15 speakers.

With each of these products and more besides, the Meridian pairing has proved its mettle by producing music of the utmost

sophistication and clarity. There was a sharp sense of focus and dynamic range even when used at very low replay levels, which is a vastly more searching test than turning the volume on full blast. The bass may not have quite the declamatory quality of the best multibit players, but for the first time in such a comparison none of the underlying information content of the music was missing via the BitStream player.

There were other impressive qualities too, not least the way the Meridian completely eluded stereo imaging traps. The Meridian almost imperceptibly painted the furthest reaches of the soundstage, and the scale and solidity of images painted in space – always assuming this kind of information content is present on the original.

The 602/606 is as near to a definitive state of the art as any at this price, and is only broadly equalled by a tiny group of players at even less palatable prices.

### AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Matching 602 CD transport and 606 digital to analogue converter.
- ▶ Utterly colourless quality to the sound allows you to hear the heart of the recording.
- ▶ Resolution of fine detail is among the best of any CD player.
- ▶ Stereo imagery paints the furthest reaches of the soundstage.
- ▶ Sharp sense of focus and clarity apparent even at the lowest listening levels.
- ▶ 606 also available in 603 guise with a pre-amp built-in.