

OUR TOP 50 *loudspeakers*

his or her street. Certainly worth a lengthy audition at least.

The largely hand-built Impulse looks good with its grille in place but might be thought a little less attractive when it is removed. This isn't due to any lack of care about its construction, rather a reflection of the nature of the beast – the midrange horn cavity at the top of the baffle has echoes of rock PA hardware.

The bass loading for this speaker is also provided by a horn whose mouth is at the speaker's base, so use the spikes provided to support the speaker. Don't sit it straight onto the carpet or you'll upset its operation. Great fun, and great value – if VFM comes in at £2000!

Impulse H2

Price: £2050

Sensitivity: 94dB

Impedance: 8ohms

Size: 116x45x27cm

Our verdict

You want power? You want awesome dynamics? You want volume levels that'll make your cat sick? Look no further than the mind-boggling H2s. The only problem will be accepting anything less!

Sound quality	★★★★★
Compatibility	★★★★★
Construction	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Meridian D600B typically £2950

To get to grips with the extraordinary D600Bs, you have to look no further than the model designation – D is for digital, and the B is for BitStream. Because these floorstanding monsters have packed within their classy cabinets preamps, power amps and even BitStream DACs. So all you need for a complete CD playing system is a transport...like the well-regarded Meridian 200!

Setting up is a little more complex than with conventional CD / amp / speaker. Each speaker is controlled by an onboard computer, and connected to its twin and the transport by both digital signal feeds and what Meridian calls its "comms" system – DIN plugs and cables which carry commands between the various parts of the system.

Unlike most active speakers, the D600Bs don't need a preamp to operate – it's built in, and allows the speakers to be controlled entirely by the accompanying 609 remote handset.

When it comes to positioning, we recommend about a metre

out in every direction, and slightly angled inwards. Too close to the back wall and the bass can become bloated and boomy, demanding bass cut on heavier music, while having the speakers firing straight down the room can result in a slightly flat soundstage.

Thus set up, the Meridians produce a tight, fast and very exciting bass response. Of course, the lower frequencies are not in the seismic league of the Impulse H2s, but they're still mightily impressive, especially coming from modestly sized boxes full of electronics.

The combination of the D600Bs and the 200 transport prove more than adept at keeping pace with the music, driving it along with gusto and energy.

With lighter popular material, the set-up proved its ability to cruise, the smoothly detailed nature of the BitStream D-to-A converters proving a superb foil for the power of the onboard amplification.

It's the power of the 200/D600B to reveal the true quality of a recording which could lead to some initial disappointment with orchestral music – even recordings which you think you knew well can be exposed as a little harsh.

Aside from putting enormous demands on the quality of the discs fed through the system, the D600Bs may also present a problem when it comes to building a more complex set-up – it's either going to mean a lot more interconnect runs to the speakers, or else investing in a passive preamp to perform the various switchbox duties.

But take into account the open, detailed performance, and this system makes a lot of sense.

Meridian D600B

Price: £2950

Sensitivity: not applicable

Impedance: not applicable

Size: 116x83x35cm

Our verdict

Hardly the most conventional speaker system, the Meridian comes crammed with technology. Just by chance, it also happens to offer a level of performance that more than justifies the high asking price.

Sound quality	★★★★★
Compatibility	★★★★★
Construction	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★



Impulse H2: left, hand-built horn loaded speaker that resembles rock PA hardware; **Meridian D600B:** above, all you need is a transport!; **Ruark Accolade:** bottom left, beautifully constructed; **KEF 105/3:** below, revealing and well made

