

Meridian G08 CD player

G-Force! Meridian's new modular series is striking, stylish – and 'future proof'



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Meridian's G Series is its most important new product introduction in a decade. Slated to replace the venerable 500 Series and developed from key models in that range (and, more significantly, from the flagship 800 units), the G Series has been launched with no fewer than 12 models. There are four players, two pre-amps, a receiver, a DSP processor, three power amps and DSP loudspeakers. All aspects have been thought through new or anew.

The styling is unmistakable. Striking and authoritative, it makes a statement even before performance is considered. This, I think, is Meridian co-founder Allen Boothroyd's most elegant visual concept to date, combining a new line in the familiar 'finger' controls (which are now proper keys rather than ridges) and black glass detailing with a new, predominantly metal cabinet, and available in traditional Meridian all-black or a new textured silver. The modular, card-based approach central to the 800 units finds itself an

equivalent here, so that many of the units have 'future-proof' upgrade possibilities. Standard operation is managed from the front panel buttons, but the minutiae of a comprehensive set-up is established through a serial link from a Windows-based computer. All such settings are held in non-volatile memory; when required, software updates can be downloaded from Meridian's website.

Meridian has moved to full width (440mm) cabinets from the midi (332mm) of the 500 Series, a necessary change in view of the density of circuitry that now has to be accommodated in models such as the AV units and receiver. One clever aspect of the styling, though, is that it doesn't look that much wider: essentially, the familiar midi fascia has been incorporated between two substantial end blocks. Full width invites EIA-standard rack mounting in studios and indeed suitable adaptor kits are available.

As before there are mix-and-match options to suit system extents and aspirations: unbalanced analogue CD-based stereo with the G07 CD player feeding the G01 pre-amp, and, say, G56 power amplifier and speakers of your choice; balanced analogue with the G08 CD, G02 pre-amp and G56 or G57; through to digital surround and video with the G98 DVD-A player, G68 surround processor and DSP loudspeakers. There's a receiver for the first time in the company's history – the G51 –

while the unbalanced G01 pre-amp and G91 DVD-A/tuner/controller have a built-in AM/FM tuner with RDS, saving a separate box. The G51 incorporates a power amplifier section too, of course, while the G91 includes video processing with two-channel and multichannel outputs. Nicely 'retro' is Meridian's inclusion of a volume control knob where relevant, for the first time in more than two decades. Behind it, though, is a rotary encoder, the gain itself handled by a digital controller.

All units have a fascia complement of seven key buttons, augmented by additional push-buttons. One of these is for on/off from standby, another controls the display and on the disc players a third is for tray open/close. The clever thing is that five of the key buttons are context-dependent; their function defined in software and labelled dynamically in the new high-definition vacuum fluorescent display (16 levels of brightness can be chosen; it can also be blanked).

A series of menus for these 'soft' keys is accessed by pressing the second of two of the permanent function ones. More, while a return to the top level is automatic after a time free of any key presses or can be made at any time by pressing the first, Home. On a CD player for example, this allows access to secondary functions such as fast forward/reverse, repeat, and track programming, which on 500 Series players were only available

through the handset. The new 52-button Meridian System Remote is excellent. Its predecessor's diminutive rubber pips have given way to decently-sized hard buttons all of which are backlit when any one of them is pressed in low-light conditions – a real 'wow' feature when you first encounter it. A learning handset, it is supplied with a library of signal codes for common third-party units, including televisions, VCRs, cable and satellite receivers and CD-R, MD, LaserDisc and DVD players. It can also acquire the codes of existing handsets and even comes with an alternative set of source-input button tops.

So, to the G08. This is the better of the two G-Series CD players, the range equivalent of the 588. Like the 588 and 800, it employs a computer type CD-ROM drive for data recovery and can play virtually any PCM-encoded disc: CD, CD-R, CD-RW and the CD side/layer of DVD/CD and SACD hybrids. It can also play CDs containing folders of MP3 files (64–256kb/s). This is capable of spinning much faster than a normal CD platter, allowing multiple re-reads for optimal data recovery from difficult discs. As with the 800 (but beyond the 588) upsampling is employed to convert the data stream to 24-bit at 176.4kHz for subsequent D/A conversion, and to 88.2kHz for the digital outputs – S/PDIF on coaxial and optical carriers. The benefits of upsampling have been well documented in these pages so I won't repeat it all again here. Probably the most significant aspect is that it enables filtering far beyond the range of human hearing.

Triple FIFO (first-in, first-out) buffering circuitry is employed in conjunction with ultra-high stability clocking to reduce jitter to (claimed) zero audible effect, the data being re-clocked after it has been pulled from the disc. Analogue outputs are on RCA phono (unbalanced) and XLR, the latter enabling

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fully balanced working through the G02 pre-amp and on to the G56 100W/ch or G57 200W/ch power amplifiers.

The ease with which this player articulates complex musical textures is breathtaking. I've been revisiting that fine old Decca recording from 1983 of Respighi's three 'Roman' tone poems from the Montreal SO under Charles Dutoit, recorded in St Eustache by John Dunkerley [410 145-2DH]. Decca never did shy away from a wide open top end and on some players the slightly fuzzy edge that results can become a little wearing. With the Meridian G08 (and as I recall, the 800) the upper strings retain their brightness but lose 'that edge', to reveal a crystalline transparency. It's a wonderfully coherent sound.

The CD compilation work I do each month on a selection of new classical releases invites the

All Meridian's G Series models are 'full-width' rather than 'midi': the AV products in the range needed more space inside

regular burning of additional masters for use in A/B equipment listening tests (which is especially useful with players such as the 588 and G08 that are designed to play CD-Rs). For this test the two players were connected to the 502 preamp via their unbalanced outputs and the sensitivities on the 502 inputs set the same (0dB). Both players also have polarity (absolute phase) switching (changeable only from the handset) which was likewise set the same. Important, this, since the differences due to a reversal of absolute phase can

be as significant as those due to variations in performance. Identical discs were used and the players cued together. Thus one could switch at will without disturbing the musical flow.

The differences were fascinating. With a few rather nondescript recordings it was virtually impossible to tell the players apart, but on most – for example Anne Sofie von Otter in a recital of Swedish songs [DG 474 700-2GH; superb], Delius orchestral works from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Lloyd-Jones [Naxos 8.557143; excellent], Brahms Symphony 2 from the LSO/Haitink [LSO Live LSO0043; live, good] – the differentiation between voice and piano, between piano and orchestra, between instruments within the orchestra was significantly enhanced, with more space around individuals and the overall canvas a fraction better lit. The new Schumann

piano recital from Leon McCawley [Avie AV 0029] is a slightly cavernous, though good, recording which via the G08 sounds less constrained by the hall acoustic. These are subtle distinctions but they are quickly telling.

It is difficult to believe that progress is still possible in a medium whose 16-bit/44.1kHz parameters were set more than two decades ago. Meridian and a few others keep demonstrating that it is, though. Certainly the G08 is a fabulous sounding player. It will acknowledge but a few peers and will answer, I'll wager, to none. ■

Ivor Humphreys

Technology

In the G08, the CD is read and, if necessary, re-read to provide optimum data integrity ahead of the processors. Elaborate de-jittering techniques are used, with triple data buffers and an ultra-stable clocking system. Direct-coupled audio outputs are provided on unbalanced RCA phono and fully balanced XLR, while coaxial and optical S/PDIF digital outputs are provided at sample rates up to 88.2kHz. Power supply is a universal switch mode type, suitable for mains supplies the world over. The circuit is constructed on multi-layer boards with a card-based approach to facilitate future upgrades. The G08 is supplied with the new back-lit Meridian System Remote learning/programmable handset.

Features

- CD-ROM drive for overspeed data recovery
- CD data is upsampled to a 24-bit D/A at 176.4kHz
- Elaborate buffering, de-jittering and upsampling

