

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Silver sophisticate

Meridian updates its popular G-series with a proprietary filter for enhancing CD quality

PRODUCT Meridian G08.2

TYPE CD player

PRICE £2,250

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x9x35cm

• Weight: 9kg • Analogue outputs: 2x balanced XLR stereo, 2x phono stereo • Digital outputs: 1x optical, 1x electrical • Upsampling to 176.4kHz/24-bit • Apodizing digital filter

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Throughout a thirty year history, Meridian has ploughed its own furrow to very good effect, combining the creative engineering talents of Robert Stuart with those of industrial design guru Alan Boothroyd to produce some of the most original and beautiful 'high-end' hi-fi equipment on the planet. The company has been a noteworthy pioneer, responsible for a

number of innovations in multi-room, multi-channel and home cinema sectors, but especially in digital audio, where it was the very first company to introduce an 'audiophile' CD player, then later develop the MLC (Meridian Lossless Compression) system, before being deeply involved in the DVD-Audio format.

When the G-series was originally launched some five years ago, the components tended to reflect the company's preoccupation with multichannel surround sound. The fact that it included two standalone CD players (G06, G08) seemed almost like an afterthought, though both models proved rather more commercially successful than Meridian had anticipated.

Given the rate of change that goes on amongst electronic components and

mechanical devices like disc drives, five years is quite a long time to keep a particular CD player design in production. Although this new G08.2 looks just like its predecessor, and carries exactly the same £2,250 pricetag, introducing it provides Meridian with the opportunity to incorporate the latest thinking and componentry and do so at the same time as its 'flagship' 808 model also graduates to Mk2 status. It's fair to assume that these two models will share a number of techniques and components, even though they are very different in terms of price, casework and internal architecture. The smaller, neater G08.2 features a slot-loading system for discs, rather than the 808.2's sliding drawer, fits most of its electronics on a single horizontal board and naturally involves some economies in components and power supplies.

It's a very attractive player. Finished in a mixture of silver anodised metal and black glass, it has just enough styling to make it look interesting and avoids over-egging the pudding and becoming fussy, though the fastidious might find the mix of fascia typefaces rather unnecessary. The player is fairly slim, but quite deep, the regulation 'full width' fascia mollified by nicely rounded vertical edges.

Most major functions are available from a row of five back-lit piano key buttons, assisted by a 'shift' or 'soft' key labelled 'more' which adds extra functions like scan, repeat, display brightness and track programming, identified on the clearly legible vacuum fluorescent display. The Atapi ROM disc drive has a slot-loading mechanism, like those used for laptop computers and dashboard in-car players, so all that's needed is an 'eject' button.



“...having the naked disc sucked from one's fingers might seem unfamiliar, but it's a fast and efficient means of loading a disc.”

However, these controls are really just a back-up, as most operations will be carried out using the remote control unit – the term 'handset' is hardly appropriate for the quite bulky table-top device supplied here. Codenamed MSR+ and about the same size as a paperback book, this unit is willing and able to operate a complete Meridian system, may be programmed to control source components from other brands and even comes with its own instruction booklet.

The rear panel is well-stuffed with socketry, ensuring fine connection flexibility. Both balanced (XLR) and single-ended (phono) stereo outputs are available, as are S/PDIF digital outputs in both optical (TOSlink) and electrical (phono) form. Extras include an RS232 plus infra-red sensor reception and comms sockets for integration in Meridian systems.

The G08.2 uses a computer-style ROM drive to read the CDs and this allows high scanning

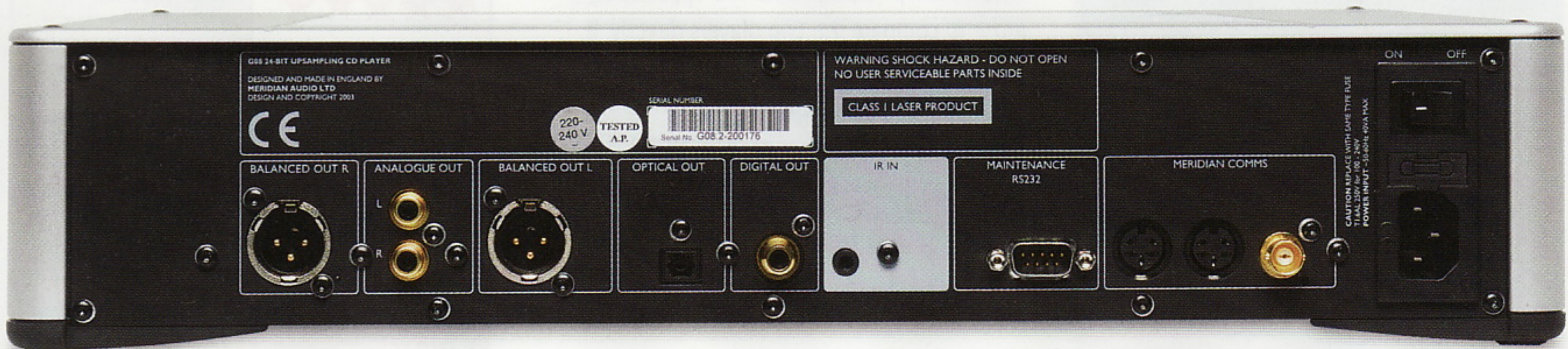
speeds so that data can be re-read if necessary to ensure accurate recovery and error avoidance. The associated buffering system uses re-clocking to minimise jitter. The player handles regular CDs, CD-Rs, CD-RWs and the majority of 'hybrid' discs and will deliver the data from DTS CDs via the digital output for external decoding.

High bandwidth/bit-rate (176.4kHz/24-bit) Delta Sigma DACs are used and a powerful 150MIPS (million bits per second) digital processor upsamples the regulation 44.1kHz/16-bit CD data to 176.4kHz/24-bit for feeding to the internal DACs, or to 88.2kHz at the digital output. Much of what we don't like about the CD medium is to do with the players' anti-aliasing filters and the steeper linear-phase digital filters that replaced analogue minimum-phase filters also generated pre-echo. Upsampling the data rate allows the digital filtering to take place well above the audio band, to minimise its in-band

intrusiveness, and the considerable power of the DSP chip allows the use of Meridian's new 'apodizing' digital filter, which delivers a minimum phase output that is free from ripple or pre-echo. It is even suggested that CDs played back via this filter can sound better than they did at the mastering stage in the studio.

Discovering that the G08.2 had a slot-loading mechanism came as a bit of a surprise. In the very early days of CD, some of the first dashboard slot-loading in-car players were accused of scratching discs. Such possibly hypothetical worries of twenty years ago might seem risible today, but probably explain why this approach is still uncommon amongst standalone CD players today. No such concerns raised their heads here, it should be stressed: having the naked disc sucked from one's fingers might seem unfamiliar, but it's a fast and efficient means of loading a disc.

Ergonomically the player itself is a delight to use and one couldn't help admire the intelligent way the main control buttons have been configured. The remote control unit is a rather different matter. While those operating a complete and complex Meridian system might well appreciate its considerable flexibility, it goes so far beyond the



Q&A

We spoke with Bob Stuart, Meridian's Chairman and Chief Technical Officer



HFC: It's nearly five years since Meridian introduced the original G08. In comparison, it would seem that the main difference in the new model lies in its use of a slot-loading-disc drive mechanism. Was there a specific reason for making this change?

BS: There were several reasons. The prejudice against slot-loading has gone away (partly thanks to Apple's laptops) and we believe its inherent simplicity benefits sound quality. And because we use an automotive-grade mechanism, it's reliable, durable and good at vibration resistance.

Could you please describe and explain any other significant changes in the new model?

A different CD decoder gives greater error correction and the electronics have a lower noise floor because there are fewer clocks. But the most important change is the introduction of the apodizing filter. It's really exciting the way this removes CDs distracting 'edgy' quality, so that CD starts to sound very like the higher resolution digital formats. It can even correct for the pre-echo problems created by A-to-D converters during the original recording process. I now find I can do demonstrations with early 1990s DG recordings that previously sounded quite unpleasant.

Although I understand the G08.2 has the same 150MIPS capacity processor and apodizing digital filter as the 808.2, it's a little behind in sound quality. Can you explain the main compromises?

The 808.2 has a superior implementation of the apodizing filter. An extra FIFO buffering stage means that it also has lower jitter. And the analogue stage is better separated

A number of the G08/ G08.2's features are oriented towards integration in a complete Meridian system. How are sales split between players bought as standalone items and those integrated into complete systems.

This varies considerably from one territory to another. We certainly sell more CD than DVD players, especially in the UK, Europe and the Far East, where there seems to be a trend back to two-channel stereo. The US is more DVD and surround sound oriented. However, the really crucial question has to be: can we avoid an MP3 future?



relatively simple requirements needed to operate a CD player that the words 'sledgehammer' and 'nut' come to mind. While the MSR+ will be difficult to lose down the side of the sofa, a much simpler, smaller and lighter CD-dedicated handset might perhaps be a worthwhile inclusion in the accessories box.

Connecting up is straightforward enough, though preamplifiers with balanced inputs are a rarity in Britain and none was available at the time the review was carried out. The G08.2 could, therefore, only be auditioned via its single-ended phono outputs, whereupon it delivers very satisfactory results indeed.

In truth the term 'satisfactory' is classic British understatement, as this is a very fine CD player indeed, with very few grounds for criticism. It's essentially sweet, with a wide dynamic range above an effectively inaudible noise floor. It delivers precise and well-focused stereo images with decent depth and plenty of air and ambience. The full, firm and positive bass delivery is, perhaps, its strongest suit, providing the solid foundation that underpins any musical performance.

However, don't assume that the G08.2 is an 808.2 on the cheap. It might share much of the same technology and cost less than one third of the price, but since the opportunity arose to compare the two players directly, it

was clear that the senior model has the edge on its less costly sibling. Good though the G08.2 is, it doesn't quite match its senior rival in terms of total voice coherence – consonants and sibilants aren't quite as sweetly integrated in the whole, leading to a slight increase in artificiality and a sound that's a little less relaxing over the long haul.

The G08.2 handled everything on Laurie Anderson's 1989 *Strange Angels* disc with considerable aplomb, from the crisp, powerful echoing bass on *Monkey's Paw* via the atmospheric 'clubland' scenario on *Beautiful Red Dress* to the delicate vocal harmonies of *The Dream Before*. The impressive bass delivery stands out as its most obvious strength, but nothing really lets the side down and the price seems very reasonable for the overall package and standard of performance. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

Complex remote control particularly suits it to complete Meridian system operation. Advanced digital processing with special apodizing filter gives a very clean sound that avoids the usual digital artefacts; the firm, deep bass is another plus.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE



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