



Fab in Every Respect

The Range Rover Evoque with Audio by Meridian

By Jeff Dorgay

The new Range Rover Evoque presents a quandary to high-end crossover SUV buyers. Since it doesn't have a massive V-8 engine, traditional Range Rover owners question whether it's worthy of the luxury nameplate. A four-cylinder, direct-injection, turbocharged power plant takes the V-8's place. Claimed highway mileage is 28mpg.

All but one of my friends that own full-sized Rovers (which start at \$82k) went Churchill when I suggested that this vehicle is sensible and would perhaps make the Range Rover accessible to the likes of Hyundai Tucson owners like myself. As my plane hit the ground in Los Angeles, where I'd be taking the Evoque for a spin, an episode of "Top Gear" crossed my mind. What did my automotive heroes think of the new Rover? Would this merely be an entry-level lump re-badged for a cash grab? Most importantly, how good was the Meridian sound system?



After a quick ride to the car park, there she was, with enhanced 20-inch wheels wrapped in black as well as a panoramic glass-roof upgrade. The window sticker revealed my model loaded with every conceivable option, pushing the scale at \$62,000. A nicely appointed version can be had for about \$52k. Eliminating the Meridian sound system drops the price well below \$50k.

The System

But what a sound system. While Europeans can get a 12-channel, 11-speaker, 380-watt stereo or 15-channel, 17-speaker, 825-watt system, Evoque models delivered to US customers only have the latter option. Here, the American “bigger is better” philosophy makes perfect sense.

Taking advantage of its home-audio speakers that utilize the same technologies, Meridian designed a fully active DSP system that goes even further in the automotive environment.

Each of the 17 discrete speakers is directly driven by its own power amplifier, with the DSP engine working as a crossover network and room correction—or, in this case, cabin correction, by fine-tuning the system to the environment in a way not previously possible.

An in-dash CD transport joins high-level and USB inputs, accommodating about any portable device imaginable. The Meridian sound system offers Dolby PLIIx and DTS Neo:6 surround sound options as well as its namesake Trifield technology (based on Ambisonics). In short, the Ambisonics decoder processes the entire soundfield in a manner in which a specific signal is presented to each one of the speakers. It creates a more coherent surround soundfield, and one equally palatable to every listener in the cabin—no small feat. Bob Stuart, director of Meridian, said this particular masterpiece took “a lifetime of experience and 12 months of work” to go from concept to finished product.

Enough Talk, Let's Rock

Jumping on the 405 South and heading towards Newport Beach, I skipped Guns N' Roses' obvious “Welcome to the Jungle” and chose “Black Leather” from their 1993 covers record *The Spaghetti Incident*, cranking the volume control until it hurt, before ultimately dialing it down to perfection. The delivery? Effortless.

Meridian claims that “wherever you sit in the Evoque, you're sitting in the best seat in the vehicle.” With the needle on the speedometer settling in at 115mph (with surprisingly little traffic on the 405), it felt like Slash was out on the vehicle's bonnet, in front of a wall of Marshalls, and the rest of the band in the back seat. Spectacular! Meridian's Cabin Correction eradicated exterior noise, and thanks to the ultra-comfy heated leather seats, I felt like I was sitting in a recording studio rather than driving a four-wheeled cruise missile through the heart of Los Angeles.

Chilling at Sub-Light Speeds

Sliding onto the Pacific Coast Highway in the Evoque as the sun sets on the Southern California coast is the most fun you can have with your pants on. I slowed the vibe down with Stephane Pompuougnac's *Hotel Costes 15*. “Close To My Fire” features some of the deepest, most dynamic beats on the record and reveals just how low the Meridian system goes. And again, I couldn't resist turning up the volume control—the system's natural delivery just begs you to do so.

As darkness ensued, Orelha Negra's self-titled disc provided a necessary R&B groove. All I needed to make the *mise en scene* complete were gangsters following me in a Camaro while I headed for Malibu. Returning from a quick bite revealed another of the Evoque's coolest features.

When you unlock the car, LEDs on the mirrors shine little puddles of light on the ground. If this is one of Posh Spice's style cues, it's a great suggestion. (Her office declined comment on the level of her involvement in the car's actual design.)

On the following morning's breakfast run, the BBC Philharmonic's recordings of Arnold Bax's *Symphony No.6 in C major* proved perfect, revealing both the Meridian's delicacy and tonal accuracy. The soundstage was tremendous, feeling as if I luxuriated amidst a giant Jacuzzi filled with musicians. This represented the best validation of the DSP processing: Few cars are quiet enough to play classical music in a satisfying manner.

My day with the Evoque came to an end much too soon. I shuffled jazz and some classic rock favorites, all to highly satisfying results. The Meridian system has no apparent limitations.

A Major Success

Stopping to fuel up, curious to the price of my aggressive behavior, I discovered my mixture of in-town and freeway driving yielded 24mpg. Luxury, responsibility, and exceptional sound rolled into one package. I could report back to my good friends that this vehicle is worthy of the badge. Indeed, the Evoque ticks all the proper boxes. And the sound system propels Meridian to the top of the heap, on par with Naim (Bentley) and Burmester (Porsche) as the only purveyors of high-end auto sound.

Oh, and should you care to see what James May of “Top Gear” had to say about the Evoque's automotive performance, click here: ●

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