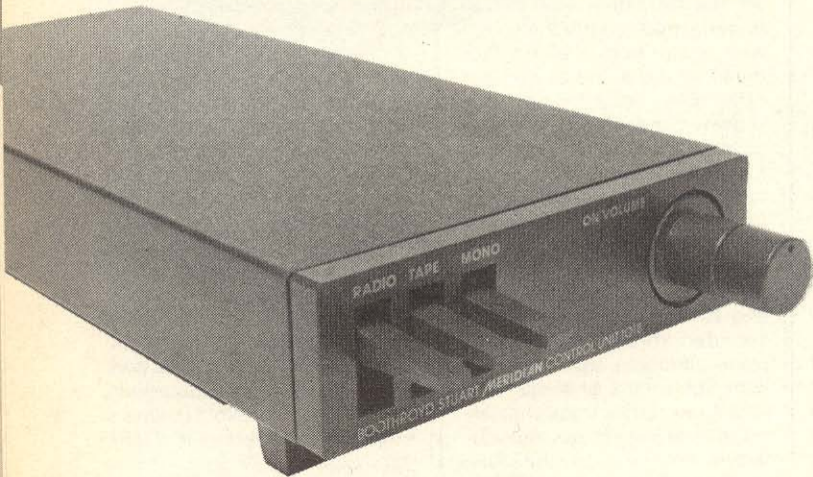


Meridian 101B



MERIDIAN'S Design Award winning 101 pre-amplifier has been with top-end hi-fi for a good many years now and has recently been seen by many to be the weak point in the whole Meridian system approach. The pre-amplifier received for review is the latest revised version with balanced output suitable especially for driving active loudspeakers. The detail changes over the old model pre-amplifier include a completely redesigned mother board and ground tracks which are designed to cut down noise. The power supply too has been improved and electrolytic capacitors have been removed from the signal path

to be replaced by tantalum or metal film capacitors which are meant to produce less degradation to the sound. The DIN-to-phono convertor has now been omitted in favour of a gold-plated phono flying lead for the disc input.

For those readers unfamiliar with the Meridian system, the pre-amplifier is one of a range of modular electronic units designed for good sound quality through simplicity. The only controls on the 101 are the switches for tape and radio sources and the mono/stereo switch. The long rotary knobs to the right of the fascia are the balance control (behind) and the volume control. The Meri-

Auditioning

dian is built to DIN standards and a gold-plated conversion lead was used to connect the pre-amplifier into the review system.

Internally the Meridian pre-amplifier electronics follow the modular-thinking of the pre/power amplifier/loudspeakers approach. The mother board carries one double module for input loading and equalisation while a further module is used to interface the pre-amplifier to the power amplifiers or active loudspeakers. The input modules can be exchanged but for this review we opted to have the moving-coil (IMCOS) module.

Oddly enough there was some residual hiss from the Meridian pre-amplifier which was not as quiet as the Sony or Musical Fidelity. With the Dire Straits Compact Disc copy from the Sony PCM tape the Meridian produced a very neutral almost clinically pure sound, criticised by one listener for lacking body. With the New Year's Day Concert Compact Disc material the Meridian showed its ability to reproduce truly wide range dynamics with massive impact and excitement but an equal ability to show quite subtlety in the music. The balance was all a little far-off, maybe due to the shallowest presence droop in

the frequency response though it could equally well be this listener's interpretation of a clean undistorted sound quality. Stereo imagery was excellent though the sound lacks some low end weight if not detail.

Using the FR moving-coil cartridge with the Berstein ballet material the Meridian showed a very detailed, subtle quality with no low bass overhang and a very dry, controlled bass drum sound - indeed just as it should sound. Both the sound's tonal quality and imagery were crisp. The Wagner piano recording produced a very vibrant, clean sound with every nuance por-

trayed. The lack of body in the sound could make the pre-amplifier sound at times a little sterile but the revelation of the tiniest details was considered excellent.

The Rickie Lee Jones track opens with a double-bass motif which with the Meridian pre-amplifier was well-controlled and superbly projected into the 'image'; voice was clean and clear with a dry top-end which lacked all splashiness. The live Central Park Simon and Garfunkel recording showed a good bass control with vivid imaging of the crowd, again clear, clear vocals with perhaps the slightest dry edge.