



PRICE £3350 TYPE DVD-VIDEO/AUDIO TRANSPORT ON SALE NOW

Meridian G98DH

Remarkable performance from flagship DVD-Video/Audio transport

Verdict ●●●●●

We say...

Expensive, yes, but then all Meridian products are built to last and this one will make a terrific centrepiece for any high-end home cinema system

When does the notion of 'value' cease to become relevant? Somewhere, we'd hazard a guess, between the notion that a £600 DVD player can be a justifiable expense in the right set-up (see our review of the new Denon DVD-2910 on page 41 for more on that) and here. 'Here' is the Meridian G98DH, and it costs very nearly six times that amount.

Think about that for a moment. This DVD player costs £3350. That's a plasma telly, a good projector, or a very serious surround amplifier. Yet, before you dismiss the typical Meridian owner as someone with more disposable cash than sense, remember that choosing to spend this much on your kit isn't exactly difficult: if you've got the money, walk into any

B&O dealer on any high street, and you can spend every bit as much every bit as quickly. You'll also get a great deal more pose factor with your friends, if that sort of thing appeals to you. Everyone's heard of B&O, we presume, but mention that you own a Meridian system, and you're usually greeted with a look of polite bemusement. The point is this: Meridian owners like the notion that they've been extravagant, but they're much more interested in buying into both exclusivity and cutting-edge performance, rather than just flash design – only a handful of companies can rival the Cambridgeshire firm's reputation for high-end home cinema kit.

And after a week or so in the company of the G98DH, we're beginning to understand its appeal. This is a fabulous DVD player: everything about it is special, from the way it looks to the way it operates, and the performance... well, it's definitely fantastic (as you'd expect at this price).

Internally, as with previous Meridian practice, the G98DH employs a great deal of computer-type hardware. It's based

THE FACTS

Video outputs
HDMI, Component, S-Video, Composite

Audio outputs
3x coaxial for Meridian SmartLink, HD15 for Meridian SmartLink, coaxial for standard surround processors/receivers/amps, additional optical digital output for G98AH

Video processor
Faroudja DCI, Audio DAC, 24-bit/192kHz (in G98AH mode)

Dimensions (hwxwd)
9x44x35cm

Weight 9kg

For more details
Tel 01480 445678
www.meridian-audio.com

around a Flash ROM-memory operating system, and can be computer-upgraded with new software, using the RS232 connection, as and when required. The same serial port can also be used for set-up and configuration, also via a PC. Even the main drive is a DVD-ROM drive derived from a computer. This enables asynchronous-data reading: the transport can read ahead of the disc in 'real time', or re-read sticky data at blisteringly high speed, which should eliminate any disc jumps or freezing problems. Naturally, it's operated by entirely proprietary control software that allows for much faster disc-access times; press 'skip chapter', and the move from one point to another is uncannily rapid. The DVD-ROM approach is backed up by triple data buffering to ensure accurate digital retrieval from each disc, which ensures ultra-low jitter, while a new high-stability re-clocking system drops jitter even more.

Most usefully, at least for Meridian processor owners, the G98DH also provides the company's proprietary

SmartLink digital connection system, a simple three-phono connector that enables the digital transfer of virtually every form of audio – including DVD-A – from the transport to your processor. The same connectors will also provide Dolby Digital and DTS soundtrack decoding if required. One benefit of this approach is that, when used with a Meridian processor, the G98DH can upsample standard-resolution music and movie audio to 88.2kHz/24-bit quality, a notable benefit for spaciousness and transient response.

There's only one issue to be mindful of, though: as a transport, the G98DH has no analogue-audio outputs of any kind. Happily, a version with suitable six-channel analogue sockets included, called G98AH, is available, but the downside is it both costs more – £3625 – and loses out on the SmartLink-connection options.

This unique approach to audio design is carried over to the video domain, too. The G98DH includes both internal progressive-scan processing and video scaling, via the ubiquitous Faroudja DCDi chip. Nothing special in that: the DCDi (in various forms) lurks inside products

As you'd hope and expect, all this technology translates into sensational ability. Set to a 1080i output on HDMI, the Meridian provides a superlative image, both from its own internal DVD source, and from other video sources – computer games, in particular, really benefit from being deinterlaced and scaled. Pictures seem to have smoother, more consistent edges, while artifacts and motion blurs are notably reduced.

Meanwhile, with our reference projector, and the Meridian set to a 720p output on HDMI, the image has sensational depth of field. Though, hues are perhaps less saturated than with some players, the compensation is a colour palette that is wonderfully natural. The only downside is that the G98DH is ruthlessly revealing of a poor-quality DVD master, especially one that was engineered using a lot of 'edge-enhancement', so not all discs will look wonderful when played through the Meridian. But that's hardly the fault of the transport itself.

Spin a variety of movies and the sound quality is peerless. Granted, much of what you will hear depends on your processor

The Meridian deftly separates even complex sonic strands, unearthing previously unheard nuances in every soundtrack. It's also a good DVD-A player

far more affordable than this. But here's the clever bit: the G98DH also includes a range of video inputs (composite, S-Video and component). That means you can send in all your video sources – your games console, your satellite TV box, whatever – for progressive-scan processing and scaling inside the Meridian's video engine.

The simplest way to accomplish that would be to use the switched video-outputs of your amp, receiver, or processor, and that's precisely what Meridian envisages, too. Once all your picture signals are inside the G98DH, you can choose how you treat them. The Faroudja system allows for either conversion to progressive scan, or scaling, or both. You can opt to set 720p and leave it at that, or tweak between output resolutions as your viewing dictates. The key element is that whatever you put in to the player can be sent out of it in either analogue component form (without scaling, but with progressive scan) or in fully digital, higher-resolution HDMI. That means a G98DH is more than 'just' a DVD transport: it's also a way of getting better video for your whole system.

and amplifier, but we were able to try our review G98DH with a matching Meridian G68ADV processor, which is the partnership we suspect many buyers will opt for. In this configuration, the G98DH sounds magical: bass is phenomenal in terms of both weight and articulation, while the upsampling mode adds a sheen of refinement to even comparatively dense mixes. The Meridian deftly separates even complex sonic strands, unearthing previously unheard nuances in every soundtrack. If multichannel music is your thing, you'll be glad to hear it's also elegant as a DVD-A combination, as you'd expect given the company's heritage as one of the format's founding fathers.

Of course, the fact remains that for all its manifold talents, the Meridian G98DH is a very expensive piece of work. Would we buy one? Hard to say. Do we want one? You bet. Perhaps the fairest summary is this: while it's an extravagance, to owners of very high-end home cinema systems, it will seem like good value – because it's one of the very best there is. If you're one of those lucky few, we are very jealous.

AT A GLANCE

Meridian G98DH £3350

Value for money ●●●●●

Being honest, you could never argue that a DVD player costing this much is great value for money. It's a superb performer, but you can buy a car for this much cash and you'll also need high-quality components to go with it.

Picture quality ●●●●●

Sensational. So it ought to be, given the price-tag. But the Meridian's talents will enhance both your DVD viewing, and the quality of the other sources in your system – a real boon.

Build quality ●●●●●

Lovely, although not, initially, as macho as you'd expect. Some price rivals exude more outright 'beef', notably big Denon and Onkyo players. However, the Meridian's uncanny operating speed, and the ingenuity of its controls, mark it out as something special.

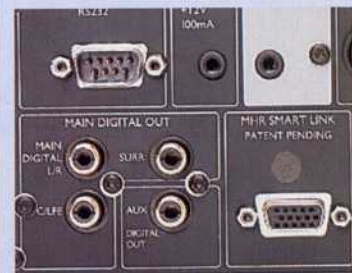
Features ●●●●●

Mostly great here too, most obviously in the shape of that ultra-flexible video scaler. However, it's a transport, not a player (at least in DH form, as tested here), and it won't replay SACD discs, if that matters to you.



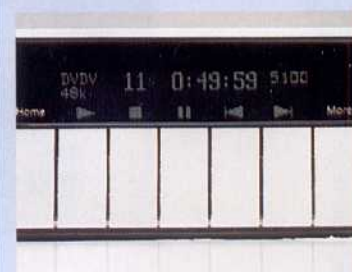
1 VIDEO INPUT SOCKETS

Not many DVD players offer video input sockets: the Meridian can accept other sources (three S-Video, two composite and a component) and convert all of them into deinterlaced, scaled, digitally transferred video.



2 DIGITAL AUDIO LINK

Meridian's proprietary digital audio link is designed to accept both standard movie and music audio, and higher-bandwidth DVD-A. It's a simple three-connector affair, although it only works in conjunction with Meridian processors.



3 MULTI-FUNCTION CONTROL KEYS

These controls are flexible: one button performs a multitude of functions. Press the 'More' button on the right to move from one control menu to another. It's an intuitive and highly effective system.

MAIN RIVAL
Linn Unidisk 2.1
£4500

Once, the answer would have been easy: TAG McLaren DVD32R. But Linn's Unidisk 2.1 offers stunning DVD quality, and DVD-A/SACD, too.

