

Much more than a DVD transport: the G98 offers exceptional video capability and the potential for a hatful of audio tricks, too



Meridian G98 £3350

FOR
Wonderful performance with both movies and music; flexibility; styling

AGAINST
It's a transport only, at least in this form – but that's unlikely to be an issue for most potential buyers

VERDICT
A sensational-quality all-rounder



GIVEN THAT MERIDIAN also produces the Reference 800, a DVD player costing in excess of £10,000, the new G98 transport could almost be viewed as a bargain. The flagship player in the company's new G series range, it's extremely flexible, boasting a specification that, in some ways, shames even its bigger brother.

For example, the G98 includes both internal progressive scan processing and video scaling, via the ubiquitous Faroudja DCDi. Nothing special in that: the DCDi (in various forms)

lurks inside far-more affordable products than this. But here's the clever bit: the G98 includes both video output sockets, and inputs (composite, S-Video and component).

That means you can feed it all your video sources – your games console, satellite TV box, whatever – for progressive scan processing and 'scaling' in the Meridian's video engine. You can then send these pictures on to your display in either analogue component or HDMI digital video form. The G98 is a route towards better video for your whole system.

On the audio side, the G98 doesn't have analogue audio outputs as standard. Since most home cinema users only use digital connections between their players and processors, it's not a problem. However, DVD-Audio capability is fitted (no surprise, given Meridian's involvement with the format), so the G98 is

available in two different models. The £3625 G98AH has six analogue outputs, and is intended for use with standard kit. Meridian processor owners should opt for the G98DH tested here, which uses a sophisticated all-digital interface, called SmartLink, to send DVD-A in its digital form. Those of you with a yearning for a stereo analogue link should also opt for the G98AH.

Predictably, performance is very impressive. Set to a 720p output on HDMI, the picture provides sensational depth of field: hues are less saturated than on the Onkyo, but the compensation is a colour palette that is natural and 'real'. Motion artefacts, jagged edges and other undesirable image nasties are kept in check, too. The downside is that the Meridian is ruthlessly revealing of a poor-quality DVD master, especially one mastered using a lot of 'edge-enhancement'.

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL

The G98 uses a DVD-ROM drive and triple-buffering to ensure accurate digital data retrieval from each disc, and aside from handling DVD-Audio, it will also provide Dolby Digital and DTS soundtrack decoding. One benefit of this is that when used with a Meridian processor, the G98 can upsample standard-resolution music and movie audio to 88.2kHz/24-bit quality.

Sound quality is peerless. Granted, much of what you hear depends on your processor and amp, but as with other Meridian DVD players we've reviewed – the Reference 800 and 596 – the G98 also contributes its own sonic magic to the mix. Bass weight and articulation are phenomenal, while the upsampling mode adds a sheen of refinement to even comparatively dense mixes, unearthing previously unheard nuances in *Pitch Black's* muscular score.

Does all that, taken as an overall proposition, sound enough to justify that hefty price tag? There's no sensible answer to that: it depends on the size of your wallet. All we can say is this: if you can find the cash, try one.



The G98's onboard video processing abilities include video scaling for external sources