



Something a little bit different this month as Jonathan Kettle takes a listen to Adil Vittachi's Meridian M1 system. These monoliths from the past are still a formidable speaker, as Jonathan found out . . .

THE M1 REACHES FINCHLEY

Meridian M1s are collector's items. At about £2500 per pair these active speakers are hardly the sort of thing you'll bump into every day. They're a sort of Jensen Interceptor of the hi-fi world. Power-guzzling super-heavy-weights with oodles of prestige — but only for real nutters.

I've never heard M1s before visiting Adil Vittachi, an articulated clerk living in East Finchley. But I certainly won't forget the experience in a hurry. Quite simply the bass from these monsters is earth-shattering.

We were put in touch with Adil by Steve Daniels, departing director of North London dealer Subjective Audio. Adil introduced Steve to hi-fi way back in 1971. While Adil has kept hi-fi as a hobby Steve became dragged into the industry and is now off to America to start his own business. In fact the tables were turned when two years ago Steve sold Adil his M1s at a really knock-down, secondhand price of £1000.

So what are these incredible monoliths? And just how good are they? For about five years the M1 has been Meridian's flagship active speaker. Though still officially available they've now been superseded by the even more outlandish M10. But many people who have heard both the M10 and M1 reckon that far from being disgraced in the

M10's company, the M1 may just be the better speaker.

For a full retail price of £2500 per pair you'd expect something a bit special, and the M1 certainly is very innovative. It's sloped front baffle houses a massive 10 inch bass driver bolted to the baffle; a horn-loaded dome unit; and a smaller dome tweeter. The amplifier, housed in the base of the cabinet, is removable once the grille has been taken off. In effect it's a Meridian 105S power amp with built-in electronic crossover. With the recent addition of Meridian 101B pre-amp, Adil took the opportunity to get a balanced lead set, thereby reducing the chance of capacitance problems and improving the sound quality generally.

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The rest of Adil's system is pretty much par for the course, a high quality front end to the system comprising Linn Sondek LP12 turntable, Linn Ittok tonearm, Asak moving coil cartridge and Meridian 101B pre-amplifier.

Speaking with Adil it soon became

fi isn't really important is it? A welcome sense of proportion but something of an unusual attitude from someone who's spent the best part of £2,000 on his gear. What made it all the more outrageous was that he reckoned he'd probably get a cheap Naim amplifier and a pair of Linn Kan speakers if starting again.

Although Adil has undoubtedly spent a lot of money on his hi-fi, he's managed to finance the changes very sensibly. From his original system of Linn Sondek, with SME tonearm, Grado F1+ cartridge, JVC JAS22 amplifier and JR 149 loudspeakers, he has progressed largely by buying secondhand and financing the new equipment by selling existing equipment with no loss.

One of the biggest expenses he's faced was the acquisition of the M1s. The sale of his old Meridian M2 speakers left him needing to find £450 which he happily parted with for the pleasure of the M1s.

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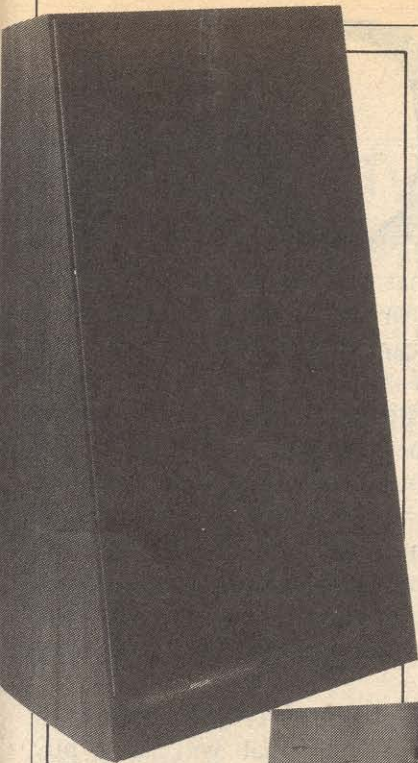
So how did the M1s fare? My first reaction when listening to a familiar album — the Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams' — was that the lead vocal of Annie Lennox was restrained, almost as if she was cupping her hands over her mouth. The more I listened and the louder the equipment was played, the more I noticed elements of the music effortlessly conveyed where previously I'd only suspected a voice or instrument.

At the same time I gradually became aware of a strange imaging quality that gave the stereo stage a rather odd shape. Shutting my eyes I envisaged the sound stage falling away progressively with height. The



The Linn Sondek-based front end with the Meridian 101B pre-amp

THE ARMCHAIR ENTHUSIAST



The huge, but stylish Meridian M1

predominantly treble sounds came from well behind the bass. In effect there was an aural mirror image of the actual speaker front.

When asked to play some of his favourite records Adil put on a



The M1 with power amp removed

number of early LPs which had, unfortunately, been knackered by an ancient Dansette player. The music was fine but the M1 system made a meal of the background noise and any imperfections in records.



Bass driver dominates front baffle

With a really well recorded album such as Steeleye Span's 'Parcel of Rogues' or Vaughan Williams' 6th Symphony the sheer power and majesty of the M1s really hit you. The speakers have a noticeable coloura-

tion — the percussion and brass on the Vaughan Williams sounded rather restrained while the low bass whoomph of grumbling cellos really whacks you in the pit of the stomach. On the track, 'Come ye O'Frae France' a deep bass note shook the solid floor really frighteningly. This sort of physical sensation would never be possible in a month of Sundays using Linn Kans, and to me it was one of the great strengths of the M1 loudspeakers.

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If you're after subtlety, the M1 can deliver too. It manages to highlight information that most speakers would mask, but at the expense of a rather high level of colouration. One thing the M1 isn't is neutral.

So, a fascinating experience, even if I remain to be converted to the M1. I still see it as a piece of unashamedly expensive hi-fi exotica. Playing music through them will give a vicarious sort of physical pleasure akin to being at a rock concert, close to the speakers. And that deep bass is just the thing to give the neighbours a fright. I suppose it all depends what turns you on...