

The Meridian 204 is a rare beast indeed – a comprehensively equipped tuner that is discreet and carries out its duties quietly and efficiently. Duties, rather than duty, since the 204 also acts as a timer unit when combined with Meridian's other electronics and/or active speakers. Wealthy enthusiasts might want to add a 201 pre-amplifier and a pair of D600 speakers and thus make it the heart of a four-grand plus clock radio!

I used it purely as a stand-alone FM tuner, connecting it in place of my usual Naim NAT02, in a Naim-powered active SBL system. Signals came from a roof-mounted Ron Smith Galaxie 17 aerial.

Navigating the Meridian's intricate control functions was eased by a comprehensive instruction booklet, which I strongly advise reading. For example, users may have remained unaware that leaving the display set to indicate signal strength has the effect of degrading the audio signal.

The signal strength measuring function is used in the initial set-up of the tuner. The variable tuning threshold allows users to instruct the tuner to ignore weak signals, thus setting up auto-scan tuning to ensure that the 204 will only receive strong stations. Setting the tuner to receive only those signals that fell into its top strength band, the 204 admitted all the stations which I listen to regularly: BBC Radios 3 and 4, as well as various London commercial stations.

The quality of sound from the Meridian on broadcasts from these and other stations was significantly better than those experienced with other mainstream tuners. For example, it was free of the paper-thin tonal-



MERIDIAN 204

£660

The 204 tuner separates weak from strong signals in seven steps. But is it polite where it should be potent, asks Malcolm Steward

ity which afflicts many tuners – the 204 sounded markedly more substantial and civil than most. In keeping with other products from the Meridian family, its sound had a warm and well-rounded character that fell very easily on the ear. Speech, like studio drama and continuity announcements, had a natural and engaging quality, without the usual illusion-destroying emphasis tuners place upon vocal sibilants.

The Radio 3 Prom season made up much of my listening. Although the 204 was exceptionally quiet and free from intrusive hiss, a duet for piano and cello revealed certain sonic imperfections. Dynamic contrasts seemed reserved, while the leading edges to notes were rather rounded and soft. Similarly, listening to choral music displayed the 204's tendency to soften stereo focus: singers were less clearly placed and acoustics less well defined. A performance by the

Yorkshire Bach Choir was transparent but the exact points of origin of the music were muddled. Rather than encouraging my interest in the music to develop, I found that the 204's presentation quickly relegated it to background status.

The 204 also seemed to emphasise the compressed quality of many rock broadcasts. This foible manifested itself as a powerful midrange that left the frequency extremes trailing in its wake. In particular, bass lines and percussion figures suffered from insufficient prominence. Listening to some lively jazz playing on London's Jazz FM demonstrated that the Meridian's extremes would have benefited considerably from an injection of bite and solidity in this area. Its composed and gentle nature made vibrant and energetic music sound restrained. Although some might welcome the Meridian's politeness, I found it too bland and lacking in candour. It is possible to pep up the sound of compressed broadcasts without making them unlistenable.

Ultimately, I find it hard to complain severely about the 204's presentation. However, its candid nature makes it a little too accommodating, obscuring the music's subtleties. I would gladly trade some of the 204's facilities, which are really for the benefit of Meridian system owners only, for a more vivid, open and stimulating sound.

DATA

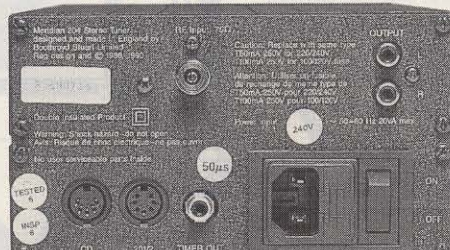
Price:	£660
Size:	160 x 330 x 100 (W x D x Hmm)
Wavebands:	FM only
Presets:	18
Sensitivity:	23µV
S/N Ratio:	68dB

DESIGN

- ▶ Synthesiser driven FM tuner with manual or preset tuning
- ▶ Microprocessor control circuits allow integration with other 200 Series components
- ▶ Standard connection for single FM antenna
- ▶ Variable tuning threshold seven 'steps' separate weakest and strongest signals accepted
- ▶ Discreet multifunction alpha-numeric display

PERFORMANCE

- ▶ Multifunction control keys can be slightly confusing
- ▶ Presentation is more suited to classical broadcasts than rock
- ▶ Midrange performance better than that at the frequency extremes



Rear socketry allows the 204 to act as a timer for other Meridian components

■ Right of Reply: see page 63

Monitor Audio Studio 20SE

Page 29

My thanks to Dave Wiley for his review. The Studio 20SE speaker is surprising everyone who hears it and has been voted best speaker in its class by the Taiwanese *Audio Art* music magazine. It is available in a variety of piano veneers at a price of £2699.

Thanks, once again, to Dave Wiley for recognising our unique design which makes use of a unique blend of materials.

Mo Iqbal

Monitor Audio Ltd

☎ 0223 242898

Sennheiser 560 Ovation II/ Stax SR34 Professional

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Both Sennheiser and Stax declined to reply.

Rogers P20

Page 33

A well balanced review with the full technical description tempered by the reviewer's willingness to experiment in depth with ancillary equipment to obtain the best from this new design.

Future designs will continue along the Darwinian path!

Colin Hinkins

Swisstone Electronics Ltd

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Meridian 204

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Iwould like to thank you for your careful review of the Meridian 204. The product is one we are very proud of, and it is good to see it reviewed once again so positively.

Obviously, in developing the 204 we were concerned to get the sound quality just right: reviewers worldwide seem to

have responded positively to this – *Stereophile* voted it top of the UK tuners this month.

Everyone will form their own view of Malcolm's criticisms of the sound. We would recommend anyone interested in a 204 to hear it first in their own system.

Sound is not all the 204 excels at. I imagine the RF performance of the 204 is something that gave Malcolm no difficulty. The 204 is in fact exceptional in that area, getting rave reports from users in 'difficult' reception areas where the signal strength is low or the spectrum is crowded.

Radio is an important source. I for one, hope the Digital Audio Broadcast causes some improvements to be made in broadcast production.

I too have been listening to the Proms this year and found some of the broadcasts to be much less than good compared to other material on Radio 3. Does anyone know what they've been doing?

Bob Stuart

Digital Gramophone and Wireless Ltd

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Audio Innovations Series 1000SE

Page 40

As a company operating in one of the few growth areas in consumer electronics, Audio Components is grateful for *Audiophile's* thorough assessment of the types of valve amplifiers that are currently available. The design philosophies may vary, but the sought after end results are usually the same. Valve amplifiers can offer a naturalness of tone and dynamic contrast that eludes solid state electronics.

We are very pleased with the review of the Series 1000SE. It is a welcome endorsement of both the circuit topology and the development of silver circuit boards.

We are aware that it was not within the scope of this review to fully describe the production process, but those involved in the use or production of circuit boards will soon ap-