

interface which is really for those using Meridian's own digital-input active loudspeakers.

However, Meridian also has another tuner, the more compact, analogue-only 204, which sells for a more realistic £660. We reviewed it over five years ago (issue 55), but long-life models like this tend to evolve and become more refined over time, so a return visit was overdue.

This brief re-encounter makes no attempt to cover all aspects of the 204's performance. Rather, it addresses the burning question: how close does the 204 get to big brother on sound quality, and does it therefore offer 604 class sound on the cheap?

The short answer is, unfortunately, that it doesn't, but arriving at that conclusion wasn't quite as simple as writing it down. My first impression was actually that the 204 had the smoother, better integrated and more coherent sound, even if it was a shade dull with it.

Direct comparison with the 604 revealed the superiority of the more expensive model in terms of dynamics, bandwidth and time coherence. The 604 produced a more expressive and invigorating sound. But the real difference showed when experimenting with an embarrassingly costly, high quality Siltech interconnect. This made little improvement over a standard cable with the 204, but allowed the superior focus and coherence of the 604 to shine.

Ultimately, you do get pretty much what you pay for. But the 204 is still a very tasty little device, the more so because it's so delightfully neat and compact. It may not have quite the same powers of analysis, nor the ergonomic slickness, of the

more expensive model, but it is less critical of the components used in the rest of the system. It also gives a smooth and homogenous sound, very much in the Meridian tradition.

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VERDICT

Meridian 204

▲ **PROS:** Ultra-compact; sweet sounding tuner.

▼ **CONS:** Can sound slightly soft; a bit expensive.

▶ **£660.00**

SOUND QUALITY

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VALUE FOR MONEY

■ ■ ■ □ □

TUNER

Meridian 204

Meridian's 604 FM tuner proved a most effective performer in our recent tuner test (issue 120). The only problem is that it's very expensive, and much of the £1,350 price is due to the unique analogue-to-digital

Following in the family footsteps; the neat and compact Meridian 204.

