

ECONOMY,



Most companies wouldn't call a twelve hundred pound CD player 'entry level', but then most aren't Meridian. David Price tries out the new 507.

Meridian calls itself the 'inventor of audiophile CD'. Now, I know many analogue addicts who'd argue that there's no such thing, but even if you accept the premise, that's still an ambitious claim. The company's first silver disc spinner was little more than a lightly re-heated Philips CD100, and moreover, one of a number of similar reworkings from various companies. Still, there's no doubting Meridian's commitment to the format. Since that first 1984 machine they've produced twenty different models, none of which have sounded bad at all. Indeed - interestingly - they've all had quite a distinctive, warm and sweet, family sound!

I have to admit a soft spot for the 506.24 which I reviewed back in the summer of 2000. At £1,195 the new 507 is a direct replacement for this very capable machine and has much to live up to. Most of its predecessor's charm came from its very smooth, subtle and engaging nature - one that was far more finessed than its immediate rivals, if not quite so striking.

This formula is pure Meridian, carried through from the original MCD. Headbangers won't like it, but

classical music aficionados with refined palettes do. To this end, you'd hardly expect the 507 to represent a dramatic break with tradition - and it doesn't.

New to the party are the 24bit, 192kHz DACs - running of course in 16/44 mode because this is a CD-only spinner - with a direct-coupled audiophile-standard output amplifier. The CD-ROM derived transport reads CD-Rs and CD-RWs in addition to standard pressed audio CDs, and has been carefully conceived to keep jitter to very low levels, achieved by double buffering techniques originally found in the 508. The digital output is precision re-clocked and 6-layer PCBs, 4 separate power supplies, the latest surface-mount technology and 'selected' components are all used for the best possible sound.

The 507 is built as befits any Meridian - it's heavy (6.4kg) for its diminutive dimensions (88mmx321x332mm) and beautifully finished to boot. Thanks to superb ergonomics it's a joy to use and all the commands (Open/Close, Play, Stop, Pause, Previous, Next and Off) are duplicated on the rather swanky 'Meridian System Remote' which is

supplied. Combined with its built-in RS232 port, this can control an entire Meridian system - the fine 551 integrated amplifier (which I reviewed over 7 years ago and is still going strong) would be an ideal partner.

Round the back there's the usual coaxial and optical digital outputs, plus RCA stereo line outs and aforementioned connection port. My only lament is the lack of that wonderful chunky CD drawer of Meridians of yore - now it's the flimsy, plasticky computer CD drive type.

Now to the sound through my reference World Audio pre-power and Yamaha NS1000Ms. It's a Meridian CD player so we're talking - yes you've guessed it - warm and sweet and beguiling and smooth and musical. No surprises there, then. Indeed, I'd go so far to say that - with the onset of DVD-A etc. - this may be the last CD you'd need to buy. It does so much so well, and what it doesn't do frankly isn't easily do-able by Red Book CD without chucking vast sums at the problem. If you really want more then you might as well go for a 'high resolution digital' solution - or a turntable of at least the calibre of a Rega P2!

CLASS

I kicked off with my favourite torture track, Mercury Rev's 'Goddess on a Highway', which can sound shrill with even quite pricey kit. The Meridian was unrelentingly civilised and sophisticated - but not, repeat not, bland. Soundstaging was excellent - it tends to hang instruments fairly well back, but still there's a great sense of perspective and wide, boldly carried left-to-right imaging. Image articulation wasn't quite as rock-solid as Naim's CD5 or Cyrus's CD7/PSX-R, but is wider and more 'capacious' nevertheless.

Tonally the 507 is as graceful as you'll get from 16/44. Bass is sumptuous and slightly over-warm (it's like what musos would call 'valve bass'), although not quite as extended as Cyrus CD7/PSX-R. Hall and Oates' 'I Can't Go for That' showed that its midband isn't as brightly lit as Naim's CD5 or even Arcam's new FMJ CD23. It's hardly recessed, but neither does it come out to shout hello. It's rather vinyl-like in this respect, and none the worse for it - vocals sound smooth and you can enjoy their timbre,

whereas lesser players either screech them out at you or simply muffle them. Treble was deliciously sweet and satisfying, but you may get the feeling that just the tiniest bit has been lopped off the high end.

Kraftwerk's 'Expo 2000' proved an interesting challenge for the Meridian. Frankly I doubt most 507 users will be into electronic dance music (exquisite as this particular example of the breed is), but this player still made a great show of it. Despite its 'polite' tonality, the Meridian is actually very grippy (obviously more so than the 506.24) and duly held on very tight as the track's bassline energetically modulated up and down. True, Naim's CD5 and Cyrus's CD7/PSX-R are just that bit tighter, but they are lighter too, and lack the impactful 'grunt' of the Meridian.

Lee Morgan's 'The Rajah' on BlueNote proved the 507's mettle at recreating 'real' recorded acoustics. With plenty of air and space, and lots of low level ambient cues, you get a real sense of 'being there'. Dynamics are very good - but not quite up to

the superlative standards of the Arcam FMJ CD23, Naim CD5 or Cyrus CD7/PSX-R. I always got the sense that the 507 was just 'rounding the edges' off transients, even if it proved excellent at the 'microdynamic' nuances and accents of the playing.

Overall it's thumbs skyward for this new Meridian. It's not the most riveting listen, but for yours truly at least, it's none the worse for it. Just as the fastest car isn't necessarily the most satisfying to live with on a day-to-day basis, the 507 more than makes up any ground it loses to excellent rivals with sheer grace and musicality. An excellent new product - and I'd imagine it would make quite a pairing with the oft-overlooked 551 integrated amplifier. ■ ▲

Meridian 507 £1,195

Meridian Audio Ltd.
Stonehill, Huntingdon
Cambs
PE29 6EX
Tel: 01480 445678
www.meridian-audio.com

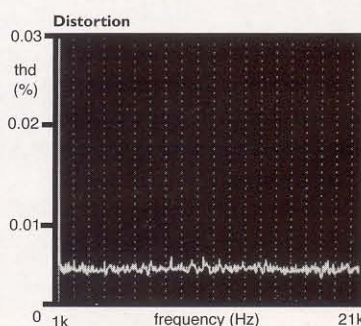
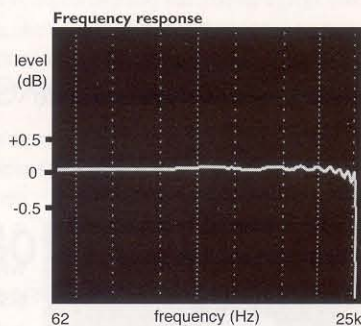
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Although this is called a '24 Bit' player it plays 16-bit CDs to 16-bit resolution and it will not play 24-bit DVDs, for example. In this case the machine's internal processing is of 24-bit resolution and as a result it should be more linear than usual. Tests showed this was the case, from maximum output right down to -90dB. Differences were slight, but they were there; the 507 produces a tad less distortion than just about any other CD player I have measured. In terms of sound quality it is probably not the distortion that matters, per se, but the general quality of the internal circuitry and this is an advanced player.

With a normal flat frequency response that extends to 21.25kHz (-1dB), and low noise, this player measures very well all round and is

likely to deliver superb sound quality from CD. **NK**

Frequency response	4Hz-21.25kHz	
	left	right
Distortion		
-6dB	0.004	0.004
-30dB	0.016	0.016
-60dB	0.36	0.37
-90 29	30	31
Separation	left	right
1kHz	117	116
20kHz	92	91
Noise		-107dB
with emphasis		-107dB
Dynamic range		112dB
Output		2.3V



World Verdict



Another quintessentially Meridian silver disc spinner, the 507 is a wondrously endearing and engaging listen.