

MERIDIAN ARGENT 2 LOUDSPEAKER



FOR several years now, products bearing the name Meridian have mostly been making waves in the categories of advanced active loudspeakers, refined digital processors and CD players. The co-founders Allen Boothroyd and Bob

Stuart have now decided to take a new look at passive loudspeakers "in the best no-compromise audiophile tradition". The new series of three models has the generic title Argent—perhaps because they all use a new Boothroyd Stuart tweeter with a

SPECIFICATION

Enclosure type: two-way bass reflex enclosure
Frequency response: 65–20,000Hz ± 2.5 dB (–6dB at 45Hz)
Drive units: 178mm bass, 25mm tweeter
Sensitivity: 89dB SPL at 1 metre for 1 Watt
Power handling: up to 100 Watts peak programme
Nominal impedance: 6 Ohms
Dimensions (W x H x D): 210 x 490 x 300mm
Weight: 30.9kg
Manufacturer: Meridian Audio Ltd., 13 Clifton Road, Huntingdon, Cambs PE18 7EJ
UK retail price: £875.00 per pair; matching stands £450.00

silver voice-coil, or because you will need to cross their palms with quite a considerable amount of silver to acquire a pair.

The Argent 2 reviewed here is the middle model in the range and costs £875.00 per pair. If funds allow, I would suggest at the outset that you consider buying the dedicated floor-stands (£450.00 per pair) which probably provide the ideal partnership. The Argent 2 is a moderately tall two-way bass reflex system, measuring 210 x 490 x 30cm (8.25 x 19 x 11.8in) but will certainly need raising from the floor to give best results. The Meridian stands raise them by 483mm (19in) and place the tweeter at a sensible 914mm (36in) from the floor. Since the loudspeakers already have the necessary three screw bushes set into the base, fitting the stands takes only a few minutes. Made entirely of slate, the stands are literally rock solid. They are also stylishly simple and are provided with optional spikes to guarantee stability on a thick carpet or other uneven floor. I used a strip of black 'gaffer' tape to dress the cables up the back of the vertical shafts.

The aforesaid tweeter behaves as a 25mm piston with an aluminium dome, a short-horn mounting plate and ferrofluid damping/cooling. The 178mm midrange/bass driver is custom built, having a flared Kevlar matrix fibre cone hand-coated with resins for added stiffness, a deep roll surround and domed dust-cover. It has a large diameter 40mm edge-wound voice-coil. Both drivers claim good thermal and power handling properties up to 100W peak programme. The

crossover network uses selected polypropylene film capacitors and iron dust inductor cores. Twin gold-plated binding posts make bi-wiring or bi-amplification easy using either bare wires or 4mm plugs.

The enclosure has an 18-litre internal volume and is constructed of heavy multi-braced MDF (medium density fibreboard). The port is situated in vertical alignment with the two drivers towards the bottom of the very solid front baffle and is flared to avoid air friction side-effects. It has a black metal grille to match the one over the tweeter. The appearance is more than acceptable with or without the main framed grille in position, and the review pair were beautifully finished in rosewood veneer with a thin layer of polyurethane. There is a five-year guarantee against defects in material and workmanship.

How they performed

The user notes supplied are quite helpful on the question of speaker positioning; it is rather grudgingly suggested that "bookshelf location is permissible" but I found that any against-the-wall placement produced such a woolly and indeterminate bass that the system's virtues were simply not being realized. "If possible," the notes continue, "have each A2 at least 20cm from the back wall and 50cm from a corner". This is much more like it: indeed a genuinely free-space position well into the room gave the best balance to my ears. The narrow front panel dimension, scarcely wider than the main drive unit, and the carefully contoured tweeter mount,

had the expected effect of producing a wide and smooth dispersion in the horizontal plane. This sensibly broadened the area in which proper stereo imaging could be enjoyed and made it quite unnecessary to angle the loudspeakers inwards.

My room checks on frequency response indicated that there is no deliberate roll-off in axial output at high frequencies. This contributed to an impressive transparency and sparkle on top-class recordings—which we should surely look for from loudspeakers at this sort of price—but could be severely revealing of over-bright recordings or pickup cartridges.

Midrange frequencies were certainly not reticent but they seemed to

cause less masking of the extreme treble than usual so that there was a feeling of two-dimensional depth, allowing the highest frequency components to float clear with a realistic degree of presence. Returning for the umpteenth time to the sweet tones of Emma Kirkby in, for instance, Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate* (with AAM/Hogwood—L'Oiseau-Lyre Ⓢ 411 832-2OH, 2/85) I felt bound to give these loudspeakers 10 out of 10 for the way they recreated in my room the full spatial impression and genuine immediacy of a live performance.

So far I have concentrated on the analytical and transparent characteristics of the Argent 2. What about bass

and dynamic range? Well it must be admitted that some other (generally much larger) loudspeakers go down further. Meridian quote 45Hz as the -6dB point, with response held within ± 2.5 dB from 65Hz to 20kHz. My tests confirmed this, with smooth unemphasized support from the bass reflex action. There was therefore ample body in orchestral music and the quick response of the system gave a nice feeling of power. High volume settings could be used with impunity, there being no suggestion of overload unease at levels well beyond the domestic norm. Just for fun I looked out the Dorian CD of Jean Guillou playing his own transcription of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an*

Exhibition on the organ he designed himself for the Zurich Tonhalle (Ⓢ DOR-90117, 10/89) and cautiously turned up the volume to a window shaking level (we have no immediate neighbours!). The Argent 2s stayed with it uncomplainingly and, though I could not be sure of identifying the 16Hz of the open 32-foot pipes cited in the Dorian booklet, there was enough clean undistorted bass to suit most palates.

Meridian have done it again. The Argent 2 design will stand comparison with any other £1,000 system I have auditioned. In terms of clean analytical reproduction it is outstanding—and it will go as loud as you like. JOHN BORWICK.