



Meridian's DVD/CD sensation

Meridian 596

DVD Video player £2350



For Outstanding picture, and a sensational CD performance too

Against Only the price

Verdict If you can afford one, buy one: the Meridian 596 is one sensational DVD player

The Meridian Reference 800 is generally accepted to be the finest DVD player around. Trouble is, it costs the thick end of £9000. 'Nuff said. The new Meridian 596 is intended to be more attainable for us mere mortals. At £2350 it's still not what you'd call cheap, but it does incorporate large chunks of the technology that makes the Reference 800 so very capable. It's not DVD-Audio capable – at least, not yet – but everything else, from MP3-encoded CD-Rs to DTS DVDs, works without a hitch, and the 596 has been specifically developed to play a tune rather well too. Which is nice.

As you'd expect, the 596 is darn sophisticated. Like the Reference 800, the construction is partially modular, with a rear-panel

'blank' that will allow a planned upgrade to DVD-Audio compatibility in the future. Internally, the 596 includes a dual-focus optical assembly, 24-bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue conversion, and a DVD-ROM disc mechanism coupled to a digital buffer system designed to reduce jitter (see panel below).

Only a coaxial digital socket is provided (not a problem in a typical set-up), but video outputs can be specified for your needs. The main choice is either BNC-terminated component sockets for use with projectors or plasma displays, or RGB-enabled Scart, with composite and S-Video outputs as standard in either case.

GETTING RID OF THE JITTERS

The 596 reads audio and video data using a high-speed, high-integrity DVD ROM drive. This data is checked for integrity, re-read or corrected, and triple-buffered to ensure that output timings are independent of the mechanical side. This is backed up by FIFO (First In, First Out) de-jittering – very precise master oscillators in the final output section – and finally by precision re-clocking to reduce errors still further.



Used through our reference Lexicon MC-1 processor, and with component video sockets in action, the 596 is a sumptuous player. It has a wonderfully film-like image whatever you play, capturing subtle differences in shade and texture with ease. Black depth is exceptional, lending both a DTS-sampler disc of *Gladiator* and our test disc of *Lake Placid* a sensationally rich, three-dimensional feel. Motion shifts, often the bugbear of budget players, are handled with confidence too.

Sonically, the benefits of a well-sorted chassis and high-quality digital output are evident immediately: the 596 simply

conveys more bass energy than lesser players, giving more force and confidence to big actioners.

And stereo? Here's where it gets really interesting, because – hold on to your hats – the 596 is a fantastic CD player. We spent a whole afternoon comparing it directly to Meridian's CD-only player, the £1800 588, and we're here to tell you there's very little to separate them.

Control, bass drive, imaging, midrange delicacy and treble smoothness: the 596 has the lot, plus poise and timing to die for. It's no surprise really – video circuitry aside, the two machines are very similar – but nonetheless, it's fantastic news.

All of which is why we're so smitten by the 596. No, it's not cheap, but then high technology often has a way of filtering down the line over time, and we're sure that if Meridian can produce a great-sounding DVD player, then ultimately everyone can.

As it stands, your choice is straightforward: £1800 for great sound (the 588), or £2350 for great sound *and* vision (the new 596). It's entirely up to you.