

## What Hi Fi, June 1996

Test One-Make Systems

### The Meridian System

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Meridian 500 CD Transport £1,195

Meridian DSP6000 Digital Active Loudspeakers £9,250

System Total £10,445

**For:** Astonishing power, presence, detail and style

**Against:** Maybe too good?

**Verdict:** Simply fabulous

The word vinyl must be a bit of a rarity down at Meridian. This company's world is populated by shining monuments to technology, a galaxy of multi-channel surround processors and multi-room command centres, all bursting with the paraphernalia of the digital world. And sitting at the top of the techno-pile, resplendent in the shiniest of deep black laquers, you'll find this set-up.

Which explains if you were wondering, why this not-exactly-cheap hi-fi system manages to appear so minimalist. In utter contrast to the Linn set-up on p48 there is apparently but one box of electronics, the 500 CD transport, a very stable, immensely low-jitter CD spinner, and nothing more. It has Meridian's own slide-out transport mechanism (the entire motor assembly reaches out to you, not just a slim drawer), and comes with either coaxial, optical or AES/EBU digital outputs.

Everything else, including most of the cash usage, is handled by the DSP6000 Digital Active Loudspeaker. Each 133cm-high column contains an on-board digital-to-analogue conversion (DAC), a pre-amplifier, a DSP processor, four 75W internal power amplifiers and six individual drive units. Four of these are mounted in the side wall of each cabinet, handling midrange and bass information; the remaining two sit in the separate "head" unit. So then, a little more complex than your standard wooden box, these DSP6000s.

All you do is feed in the signal from your (or sources) and let the speakers do the rest. All the characteristics of a normal system can be handled from the single MSR remote control (a rather large but simple affair): bass, treble, volume and even CD functions work well and are linked to the display in the speakers themselves.

It all sounds pretty good, too. No, check that: it sounds immense. Like massive. Like the biggest sound you've ever come across. The first thing that strikes you is the sheer bass power-this thing can put the seismic stuff through walls. Leftfield, the Prodge, Fluke, William Orbit-name your Lords of the Low-End and we tried 'em-the Meridian system simply shrugs, drops down a few gears and batters your ankles with more rippling tidal basswaves.

But not everything in music is about scale, we hear you cry. Indeed it is not. Meridian's system also squeezes every nuance of delicacy from vocals, guitars and simple arrangements. Keb' Mo's close-miked blues sound stunning, soaring from the speakers. The soundstage is cast from concrete, placing every point of the performance vividly and accurately.

Hunting hard to find a criticism, we could say that the Meridian doesn't quite rock out as much as we'd like it; it's almost too smooth, a little too poised. You'd perhaps expect a little more rawness to the performance: Oasis' normally brash, treble-heavy production sounded almost tolerable here. But we're willing to bet that most potential purchasers in this price bracket will be happy to trade off that little bite for all the other virtues this system possesses. As well as being stylishly minimal and radically high-tech, Meridian's deceptively simple system performs in an effortlessly musical manner that would be very easy to live with for a long time. (Hint, hint.)