

Meridian 206

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Recommended



Although ownership passed to KEF a year or two back, Meridian has retained its unique and stylish identity as one of Britain's leading hi-fi innovators. The company has pioneered active loudspeakers and round-the-house hi-fi.

Meridian has been a consistent leader in British CD developments since the introduction of the format, working initially with Philips building blocks but soon adding its own original contributions. The original *PRO MCD* model set the benchmark in its day, but the *207-Pro* was the radical step, placing Meridian for all time in the CD player hall of fame.

The 207 remained in production for several years (an aeon in CD terms), undergoing continuous development and remaining fully competitive when last assessed a year or so back (July 1989). Now it is replaced, by the almost simultaneous release of not one but two models, both of which closely mirror its unusual appearance. The cheaper of these is the 206, which at £800 is about £300 less than its predecessor; the upmarket (!) 208 is covered on the next page.

The 207 was a 2-box design, with two half-width modules making up a roughly midi-size square. The two were linked by a fixed umbilical and could not be used separately, though this did present the elegant option of stacking one atop the other. That is no longer possible, since the two modules that make up the 206 are firmly bolted together side by side.

This arrangement, and also the removal of the extensive preamplifier facilities fitted to the 207, have helped bring costs down, leaving the 206 as a comparatively conventional (at least by Meridian standards) standalone CD player. Again to keep the entry price down, a simpler though nonetheless quite adequate handset is supplied in place of the elaborate and costly 209

remote control panel.

Build is reassuringly solid, especially the substantial disc drive/drawer mechanism, and controls have good feel. Presentation is smart and discreet, with a picture-framed glass panel fascia. Features are adequate rather than elaborate, the display being rather a modest affair, and the control system a shade sluggish responding to commands. A coaxial digital output is fitted alongside a fixed output stereo phono pair.

Internally the 207 influence is seen in the multi-board layout, ribbon cable neatly linking the two modules. The sorbothane-decoupled cast chassis transport and control chips seem to be straight from the 207, without some of the modifications used in the 208. Digital decoding is based on the latest Philips multi-bit (16-bit 4X oversampling) dual DAC chip set. Good quality analogue components and circuitry is used throughout, with a discrete transistor current-to-voltage implementation. Power supplies are generously rated; filtering and de-emphasis are passive.

Lab Report

Output level is 1.4dB over the standard, and absolute phase is inverted, both factors likely to cause confusion if attempting to compare the 206 to other CD players. The frequency response is flat apart from a gentle roll-off at very high frequencies.

Dynamic range and both in- and out-of-band noise figures are very good. Low level linearity is perfectly satisfactory, as are the rather less impressive distortion and stereo separation figures, the latter showing significant asymmetry. Shock and vibration is handled well, and error correction is powerful.

Sound Quality

Exemplifying the top quality available from the Philips multi-bit chip set, and

improving significantly on the *207-Pro*, the 206 sets a lively pace with firm and articulate bass slam, confident dynamic contrasts and convincing transients. Stereo soundstages are very good indeed, with plenty of scale and space, plus fine depth and focus. The treble is tidy with good detail resolution, while the midband is crisp and clear, if slightly thin with it.

Conclusions

While it's true to say that comparable sound quality is available elsewhere for rather less money, the 206 is nevertheless a most attractive package with fine build and just the right touch of class to make up the difference. Recommendation is mandatory.

TEST RESULTS

Test resolution (L/R av)	15.5 bits
Output level, source impedance	2.35V, 1.4dB 100 ohms
Effective dynamic range	108dB
Harmonic distortion	20kHz 1.0kHz 20kHz
Ref 0dB	-74dB -81dB -90dB
at -70dB encode + dither	-40dB, 1%
Stereo separation	114/64dB 97/64dB -71/-63dB
Stereo balance L/R	0.15dB 0.16dB 0.13dB
Frequency response (ref 1kHz) 20Hz to 20kHz	±0.3dB
High frequency intermodulation	-76dB, 0.0158%
Electrical noise (CCIR/ARM, 1kHz)	-106dB
Mechanical noise	low
Ultrasonic noise	114dB
Error correction	2.4mm gap
Shock/vibration resistance	good
De-emphasis	-0.3dB to 16kHz
Track finding speed (15, YEDS 2)	3 secs
White noise overload test	OK
Size (w x h x d)	32 x 10.0 x 33.5cms
Typical price inc VAT	£800

