

Meridian 206B (DAC7)

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It was inevitable that having DAC7'd every bit of electronics it could lay its paws on, Meridian would finally get around to modifying the 206B CD player. Yet today's 206B looks no different from the original 206 with its siamesed two-box chassis, cute but useless display and ordered row of buttons.

However, though Meridian has never updated the player's fascia, its internal architecture has metamorphosed from traditional 16-bit through differential '7321 Bit Stream to the top-flight DAC7 implementation found here. OK, so the 206B employs a three-layer rather than four-layer PCB but the complement of SAA7310 decoder, SAA7321 oversampling filter, SAA7350 noise-shaper and TDA1547 DAC mirrors that of its latest 203 outboard convertor.

Meanwhile Meridian's one-piece drawer and CD transport mechanism remains unchanged as does the rather archaic Philips-issue remote control. In spite of this, however, the player still retains a uniquely conservative and purposeful image that sets it apart from glossy, Far Eastern competition.

Lab report

Technical comparisons with Meridian's 203 DAC (issue 101) are very interesting, for though the rippled frequency response and 3D plot are virtually indistinguishable, the 206B is both more linear and offers lower distortion at low signal levels. Errors of -0.8dB (re -100dB) compare very favourably with the 203 just as the -70dB trace reveals an absence of the second to fourth harmonics that cropped up in issue 101.

Yet certain features, including the wash of re-quantisation noise that sweeps across the -70dB and 3D plots, remain undisturbed. The same passive LC filter also drops its output by 0.23dB at 20kHz — harmless but characteristic. Just as typical is the S/N ratio compromised, once again, by 11.025kHz spurs despite settling at a realistic 104dB using the 1-LSB offset digital zero.

Sound quality

Plenty of bass definition, remarked the panel, as the listeners proceeded to compliment this player on its full, detailed presentation. The strung bass from Panufnik's *Concerto* rippled convincingly, sounding deep and resonant but not bloated. Images were sharply etched too, almost as if they were indented in the broad soundstage. Similarly, most listeners thought the player separated out the mass of instruments from our jazz selection with great poise and clarity.

Furthermore Julia Fordham was not, for once, draped unceremoniously between the speakers but pulled into focus, her crisp vocals remaining quite unperturbed by the instruments around her. Nevertheless the 206B failed to win unanimous praise, a few listeners finding it rather 'sparse' at times. Not thin tonally, but stilted rather than flowing. This, its detractors suggested, could lend its music a rather mechanical 'feel'.

It managed to retain its quiet composure with Mary Black's *Columbus*, however, temporarily reassuring us with its typically confident, clean and very detailed sound. Yet Christy Moore's voice lacked a little of his usual warmth, a sanitising influence that caused our panel to remark upon its continual struggle for technical rather than emotive accuracy.

Conclusion

In terms of engineering, Meridian has clearly done a great job bringing the old 206B up to DAC7 scratch. But then so it should, having already implemented similar changes to both 203 and 606 outboard convertors.

Meanwhile its cost has risen, putting today's 206B in direct competition with a 203 and any quality £400 CD player/transport. If you already own a decent player equipped with a digital output and fancy dabbling with the Meridian 'sound', then perhaps you should choose the 203 and not the 206B as the vehicle to upgrade.

TEST RESULTS

	20Hz	1kHz	20kHz
Channel Balance	0.06dB	0.06dB	0.07dB
Channel Separation	130.0dB	132.4dB	121.5dB
THD vs Level, 0dB	-111.3dB	-106.1dB	-73.5dB
-30dB	-94.4dB	-82.2dB	-47.4dB
-60dB	-60.0dB	-54.5dB	-17.8dB
-80dB	-27.0dB	-34.5dB	-9.55dB
Dithered, -90dB	-20.6dB	-21.8dB	+9.95dB
Dithered, -100dB		-19.5dB	
Dithered, -110dB		-10.6dB	
Resolution @ -60dB		-0.02dB	0.00dB
-80dB		-0.18dB	-0.04dB
-90dB		-0.79dB	-0.27dB
-100dB		-0.80dB	+0.20dB
Peak Output Level, L			2.365V
R			2.383V
Relative Output Level			+1.49dB
Output Impedance			21.3ohm
Radio Frequency Spurious		7mV @ 1.4MHz	
1Hz Noise Modulation			+5.7dB
CCIR IMD, 0dB			100.7dB
Suppression of stop-band IMD			55.1dB
De-emphasis Accuracy, 1kHz			-0.04dB
5kHz			0.24dB
16kHz			-0.28dB
S/N Ratio (A-wtd), w emp, 0LSB			110.0dB
w/o emp, 0LSB			106.4dB*
w/o emp, 1LSB			103.7dB
Digital Output			Coaxial/Optical
Crystal Clock Accuracy			+13.8ppm
Track Access Time (99)			3.9secs
Typical Retail Price			£995

