

Upgraded 206B keeps its head – and stays ahead

You'd be forgiven for not having noticed, but Meridian's "budget" CD player has just received its second fundamental upgrade. The first saw the 206 transformed from multibit to bitstream operation. Now the 206B (£995) enjoys top-notch DAC7 bitstream technology.

This has no effect on either the operation or appearance of the player — it still features a twin-box construction with its controls stage right, for instance, and still uses that archaic Philips-based remote control, the design of which is totally out of whack with the rest of the player.

But the sound? It's got plenty of energy, plenty of fizz and sparkle to liven up the laziest of speakers without frying your ears in the process. Listen to a busy pop recording and you'll find the player losing its cool from time to time, the hardest of cymbal

strokes tumbling over vocals and strings, for instance. But most of the time the 206B is a model of composure, with a measured, evenly-paced sound. Vocals aren't forced forward but sit back in the arc of instruments, focused, delightfully articulate and free of annoying sibilance.

Yet the 206B isn't quite as smooth or as refined as Meridian's most expensive kit. It's more raw-sounding but also more bubbly and exciting. Where the real high-end gear starts sounding laid back to the point of being horizontal, the youthful 206B retains a dramatic edge, drawing out the thrill of strings or the bite of brass with less caution. Yet it's this slightly more care-free presentation that can cause it to trip up on the odd occasion.



Meridian 206B (£995): an exciting performer, rarely losing composure

Compared to favourites like the Marantz CD-72, or even Rotel's RCD-965BX, the 206B is decidedly neutral, never falsely emphasising any one part of a performance. It's delicate and intricately detailed rather than robust, fresh rather than forceful – but always communicative. A

host of reasons, it would seem, for Meridian to retain its lead.

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|  | Energetic; carefree but neutral, detailed sound |
|  | Occasionally runs away with itself |