

Meridian 206 $\Delta\Sigma$



Since the dawn of digital time, Meridian has been associated with Philips, a partnership recently severed by the launch of another 206 variant, the £995 206 Delta-Sigma, spurning DAC7 in favour of Crystal's flavour of the year CS4328 bitstream chip.

Outwardly there's little change, the siamesed two-box construction, restricted display, and ordered rows of function keys contribute to an inimitable style. Inside, however, a new twin-processor servo board will now accept 'stacked' instructions, so commands can be over-ridden if you make a mistake or change your mind through a sequence of keystrokes.

New servo software improves the 206's handling of defective CDs while prompting the DAC's auto recalibrate facility every time a disc is stopped or loaded. Crystal's DAC has already been

used to good effect by Roksan, EMF, and Linn though Meridian's four-layer partitioned board with multi-regulated supplies, large Nichicon MUSE and polypropylene decoupling caps plus discrete Class A output buffer is unique.

Sound quality

This player delivered a positive, sure-footed sound without being forward or hyped-up. Unprompted, our panel likened this confidence to the Linn even though it tempers the Karik's dryness with extra warmth, ambience and roundedness. Music flows in an undemanding, natural way, sobering-up bass lines that seemed to plod or stagger with many lesser players.

Pop and vocal selections were "well lit" and "brilliant", the snap of strings and decay of piano, all executed in a clear yet methodical manner without sterility. All

pieces of music had a sense of controlled and focused power, the player seemingly unfazed by the most arduous of styles. This was exemplified by Arnold's *Viola Concerto*, a distant and barely accessible piece of music that maintained the interest of our panel with subtle counterpointing and twists and turns of strings and woodwind — often vague and imprecise on more mundane players.

Conclusion

The DAC7 version of this 206 earned Meridian little approbation in issue 107, a situation utterly reversed by the switch from Philips to Crystal bitstream technology. The result is a familiar more user-friendly player that delves deeper into the architecture of the recording without detriment to the music itself. A Best Buy for Meridian seems appropriate.

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Verdict

+ Quite the most expressive of all Meridian's players.

- Transport is cumbersome by modern standards.

► £995.00 RRP

LAB REPORT

What we have here, on the whole, is a collection of measurements that more closely resemble the Roksan ROK-DA1 (issue 113) and Linn Karik than the previous version of the 206B (issue 107). The change from DAC7 to CS4328 is immediately reflected in the -70dB plot which demonstrates the greater effectiveness of the Crystal fifth order over the Philips third order noise-shapers when both are run at a common 11.3MHz master clock frequency.

Distortion is not as low at low and mid frequencies as with the DAC7 chipset, yet this Crystal version has a clear advantage in the treble, suffering 0.0063 instead of 0.021 per cent at 20kHz. Also, what distortion exists is principally 2nd-order (see 3D plot), a character maintained by intermodulation as well as harmonic distortions. However, a 97dB S/N ratio is far weaker than possible with DAC7, as are the 1dB deviations in linearity below -90dB.

TEST RESULTS

Channel Balance	0.03dB	0.03dB	0.00dB	Output Impedance	46.0ohm
Channel Separation	109.8dB	108.6dB	77.8dB	Radio Frequency Spurious	4mV @ 11.3MHz
THD vs Level, 0dB	-103.3dB	-98.6dB	-84.0dB	1Hz Noise Modulation	+1.6dB
-30dB	-90.1dB	-79.4dB	-64.7dB	CCIR IMD, 0dB	-80.5dB
-60dB	-53.4dB	-49.2dB	-34.2dB	Suppression of stop-band IMD	96.2dB
-80dB	-22.8dB	-26.9dB	-14.8dB	De-emphasis Accuracy, 1kHz	-0.02dB
Dithered, -90dB	-15.8dB	-18.5dB	-5.50dB	5kHz	-0.01dB
Dithered, -100dB	-10.7dB	-10.7dB	-	16kHz	-0.01dB
Dithered, -110dB	-5.50dB	-5.50dB	-	S/N Ratio (A-wtd), w emp, 0LSB	101.2dB
Resolution @ -60dB	0.00dB	0.00dB	-	w/o emp, 0LSB	97.0dB
-80dB	-0.08dB	-0.25dB	-	w/o emp, 1LSB	97.1dB
-90dB	-1.05dB	-1.05dB	-	Digital Output	Coaxial/Optical
-100dB	+0.10dB	-1.00dB	-	Crystal Clock Accuracy	+5.0ppm
Peak Output Level, L	2.203V	2.195V	-	Track Access Time (99)	5.5secs
Relative Output Level	2.195V	2.195V	+0.82dB	Typical Retail Price	£995

