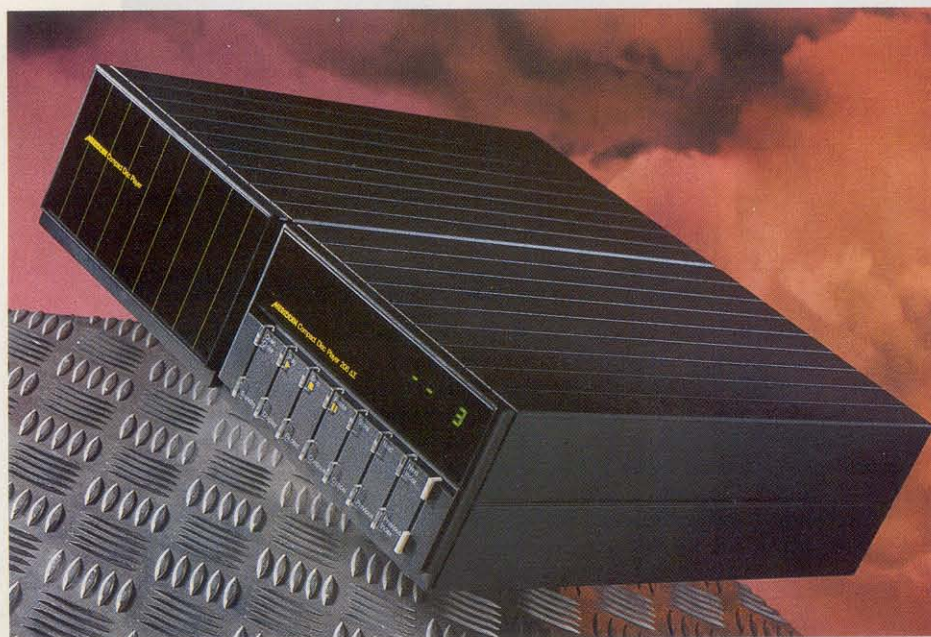


MERIDIAN 206 $\Delta\Sigma$

£995

Meridian's new two-box player uses a bitstream Delta Sigma chip. Jimmy Hughes listens out for audible benefits



In the rarefied atmosphere inhabited by £1000 CD players, Meridian's 206B established itself as something of a favourite. It gave a taste of what is offered by more exotic and expensive machines, and while I'd hesitate to describe any CD player costing just under £1000 as 'affordable' it was, as specialist audiophile machines go, quite respectably priced.

The 206B had a good run commercially, but towards the end of 1992 Meridian replaced it quietly with the 206 Delta Sigma. The new machine makes use of a bitstream Crystal Technology Delta Sigma chip in place of the DAC 7 used in the 206B. It's been thoroughly updated internally and features a four-layer printed circuit board and Meridian's own servo circuits for improved handling of difficult/damaged discs.

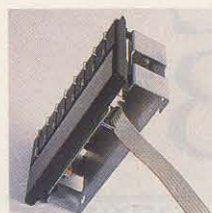
Based on the latest Philips CDM 4 transport, the new 206 features 64 times over-

sampling and new Class A analogue output stages. It's a two-box player, albeit with both parts bolted together and wired internally to avoid external transport/DAC linking cables or separate mains connections.

Meridian CD players have in the past been rather quirky to operate, but the 206 Delta Sigma has an improved layout and is easier to use than previous machines. Build quality and cosmetic finish are of a very high standard – the tough glass-fronted disc drawer and display are durable and the transport is mounted on a thick chassis plate which sits on anti-vibration Sorbothane bushes. The heavy disc drawer is provided with a thin material surround to help achieve a more airtight seal for the disc and transport; even the transit screw hole is provided with a plug to help filter airborne vibration.

We had hoped to compare it to Arcam's Delta 170.3 transport and Delta Black Box 5, but unfortunately were unable to. However, the Arcam Alpha Plus/Delta Black Box 5 make a comparably-priced package, so this was used instead. And exceptionally good it turned out to be!

Like many enthusi-



Computer grade link from display/control panel



Immaculate D/A circuit board build and layout

DATA

Price:	£995
Size:	325mm x 100mm x 320mm
DAC:	Bitstream, 64 times oversampling Delta Sigma DAC
Memory:	31 tracks
Output:	Optical; Electrical; SPDIF Phono Analogue; 2V unbalanced phono Remote control/multi-room

DESIGN

- ▶ Bitstream Crystal Technology Delta Sigma chip
- ▶ Four-layer printed circuit board
- ▶ Meridian's servo circuit for improved handling of difficult/damaged discs
- ▶ Features 64 x oversampling & Class A analogue output stages

PERFORMANCE

- ▶ Sonically very impressive
- ▶ Sounds clean & tidy, yet sharp & dynamic
- ▶ Powerful bass line
- ▶ Very good at reproducing 'difficult' recordings that sound congested or edgy
- ▶ Instruments & voices retain expressive nuances

asts, I've had doubts about very expensive CD players and add-on DACs; too few offer real value in the broadest sense. Today's wonder model is quickly superseded by tomorrow's, making expensive CD hardware a risky investment.

Sonically the 206 Delta Sigma proved impressive. It sounded clean and tidy, yet sharp and dynamic, with a strong powerful bass line. However, while it offers sonic benefits over the Alpha Plus (£450), whether these improvements were justified by the price differential remains a moot point. The Black Box 5 (a hybrid multibit/bitstream DAC) refined the sound of the Alpha Plus by a big margin, yet retained treble brilliance and overall dynamics. By comparison, the 206 produced a darker perhaps slightly more powerful sound. It wasn't as refined or as open, but it did produce a stronger bass line. Though the new 206 is very clean-sounding, the Alpha Plus/Black Box 5 was cleaner and more transparent.

I found the Arcam combination especially good at reproducing 'difficult' recordings that easily sound congested or edgy; it really sorts out densely scored textures so that instruments and voices retain expressive nuances and their individual tone quality. It's also good on simple material where its naturalness and ease can be heard to advantage.

I'm not sure the 206 Delta Sigma is quite in the same class, but it has its strengths, producing strong robust musical presentation with the emphasis on richness and weight. It lacks the Arcam combination's clean transparency, but betters it in terms of drive. A difficult choice? You bet! Could it be otherwise faced with such excellence?

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