



Meridian G68ADV

Under its sleek new silver clothing this Meridian hides the processing power of a computer, and as a result it's one of the most powerful, enthralling and sophisticated AV processors we've ever heard

The first and most obvious difference between the outgoing 500 series and the new Meridian G Series is that each component is bigger. The company's system-building ethos remains intact, however: all G Series components share the same footprint and are differentiated only by height. This is most apparent when you compare the G68ADV processor you see here to a G98 DVD player (which we'll be testing next month). While the G68ADV might be bigger than an old 565 or 568, though, it's still not huge: my reference Lexicon MC-12B dwarfs it.

Aesthetic revisions are, of course, only one part of the G68ADV's allure. That extra chassis space has been used to good effect: this is a very flexible, well equipped

provision. I went for the standard RCA phono option, linking the G68ADV into my reference Lexicon LX-7 power amp.

A closer inspection of the input fit reveals a few oddities. The G68ADV includes an AM/FM tuner, which is useful, if not necessarily as impressive as it might have been – DAB seems more appropriate to an all-digital product. Irritatingly, there's no video conversion capability built in: if you make the fullest use of the video switching, you are obliged to connect composite, S-Video and component-video outputs to your display. If you buy a G98 DVD player as well, this ceases to be a problem: unusually, the DVD player includes video inputs, which are designed to accept switched video information from

Meridian's latest processor is built to the company's usual exemplary standards

high-speed, high-capacity digital datastream between player and processor. That serves several functions: it allows encrypted DVD-Audio signals to be decoded directly in the processor, and it also facilitates both upsampling and automatic surround mode selection.

Perhaps most importantly, Meridian has taken the opportunity to massively increase the G68ADV's processing power. All processing is performed digitally at 48-bit precision by no less than five Motorola 56367 chipsets, each capable of 150 MIPS (million instructions per second) of computation. That's a total of 750 MIPS, a fearsome amount of number-crunching capability. As with the original 565, it means that, effectively, the G69ADV is a full-on computer clothed in hi-fi wrapping. The design approach confers myriad benefits, not least the possibility of software-driven upgrades, but this level of sophistication is not without potential pitfalls.

In its original, 'version one' form, the 565 was astonishingly complex to configure: setting one up could reduce experienced reviewers to gibbering wrecks. The G68ADV is a clear sign of Meridian's determination to address that issue: the new model is much easier to deal with. It's still more than likely that a dealer will install your processor for you, but at least now it's relatively easy to achieve a passable installation solely using the fascia keys.

Having said that, if you want to really hone your performance to a fine edge, one

The Meridian is effectively a computer clothed in hi-fi wrapping, and has a huge amount of processing power

processor, able to accept the inputs of a wide range of sources (check out the specification panel for more details). As standard, a G68ADV comes with outputs designed to suit both a Meridian Digital Theatre (using the company's range of active, digital loudspeakers) and conventional analogue configurations.

Depending on your layout, however, you can order a model with balanced analogue sockets at no extra cost: this G68XXV option includes eight balanced outputs at the expense of any digital speaker

a G68ADV. In other words, you connect all your video sources into the processor, and it then sends each source's video signals onwards to the DVD player. This then converts every signal to a best-case level of quality (either HDMI or component, depending on your display) – it can even apply both progressive-scan processing and scaling, as you wish – before finally sending the video into your display.

The G98 also includes Meridian's proprietary MHR (Meridian High Resolution) Smartlink, which allows a

NEED TO KNOW...
MERIDIAN G68ADV PROCESSOR

Price £4995

Processing 5x Motorola 56367, giving 750MIPS at 48-bit precision

DSP Modes Direct, Music, Trifield, Ambisonics, Super Stereo, Music Logic, Mono, THX, Discrete, TV Logic, Digital, Digital THX, DTS, DTS THX, DTS Music, MPEG, MPEG THX, MPEG Music, Pro-Logic II Music, Pro-Logic II Movie, Pro-Logic IIx Music, Pro-Logic IIx Movie, Pro-Logic IIx THX, Pro-Logic IIx Mov6, Pro-Logic IIx Mus6, Surround EX, THX Ultra2 Cinema, THX Music, all with optional Meridian Room Correction

Digital inputs

2x six-channel Meridian MHR Smart Link, 6x coaxial, 5x optical

Digital outputs

10x digital for Meridian DSP loudspeakers, plus 2x coaxial for second and third zone outputs or for connection to digital recorders

Analogue inputs

4x composite, 4x S-Video, 3x component

Video outputs

2x composite, 2x S-Video, 1x component

Dimensions (hwxwd)

13.2x44x35 cm

Made by Meridian Audio, UK

Distributed by

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 Stonehill,
 Stukeley Meadows,
 Huntingdon,
 PE29 6EX
 Tel 01480 445678

www.meridian-audio.com


Connections galore; classy remote control; and, for the first time on a Meridian processor, a volume knob



final element is a must. The G68ADV includes Room Correction, a sophisticated space-measurement system designed to give you the best possible performance whatever the size of your listening room. It, and other set-up options, can be accessed only with the aid of a separate PC. A set-up CD-ROM is supplied, and on the processor's back panel you'll find RS232 and USB inputs for a computer connection.

The Room Correction software is simple enough to configure (all you need is an SPL, or sound pressure level, meter and a long phono interconnect) and runs automatically. It operates by measuring room resonances and attempting to correct for undesirable nodes. Resonances of this type can mask other music or movie sounds, creating a muddled, confused presentation. The system compensates by building in as many as 60 digital filters for every one of your speakers, each of which attempts to limit the reverberation time at resonant frequencies to a value similar to the overall reverb time of your room.

Right. I've built the hype up for long enough: time to talk sound. For DVD players, I tried both Meridian's G98 and my normal Denon DVD-A11 reference player, and with both, I can only report that this new processor is sensational. It manages to capture the musicality of a decent hi-fi

preamp, yet has phenomenal muscle when called upon, and it does everything with an extraordinary purity. It's as if the sound has been Hoovered free of grit and fluff – you're left, even with compressed Dolby Digital, with a sound that's pristine in its clarity. I found myself spinning disc after disc, searching out new details I honestly hadn't heard before – or which, even if I had heard, I hadn't found quite so enthralling.

The rainfall in *Identity* takes on a realism you just don't expect, while the melancholy timbre of Itzhak Perlman's haunting violin makes watching *Schindler's List* even more heart-rending than normal. I'm in no doubt that Room Correction plays a big part in this: I listened with it switched in and out and, after initially finding the 'in' mode a little too dry, I slowly came to relish the precision and realism it conferred, particularly with low frequencies.

Given Meridian's involvement with DVD-A, and the company's heritage as a hi-fi specialist, it's no surprise that the G68ADV excels with music, too. I'm not the biggest fan of surround music, but there's no doubting the G68ADV's sureness of touch with even low-quality DVD-A discs. With better-engineered discs such as REM's *Automatic For The People*, it flourishes. Personally, though, I found it more rewarding listening to CDs,

especially after they had been upsampled to 88.2kHz by the G98's MHR Smartlink and then fed into Meridian's own Trifield DSP mode, which uses the centre speaker to contribute to the imaging.

In a nutshell, you'd expect a product in this price class to be able to cope well with a diverse range of movie and music signals, from blockbuster action to period drama, from classical to metal, and the Meridian does all of that with impressive ease. So let's bring this to a neat conclusion: the G68ADV is more than good enough to stand comparison with Arcam's AV8, Lexicon's MC-8, Parasound's Halo C1 and C2, and TAG McLaren's AV32R.

I loved this device. If you can afford one, I think you will too.

Andy Kerr

Meridian G68ADV processor
£4995
The score
92%

Home Cinema verdict

With souped-up processing power, the G68ADV brings out a realism and clarity in music and movies to outstanding effect. Class performer