

## MERIDIAN F80

## More than a boombox with Italian flair

Combining Meridian and Ferrari expertise has created a unique product, says Andrew Everard

There's a certain irony in Meridian's F80: co-developed with Ferrari, it's hand-built in the factory Formula 1 rival TAG McLaren constructed to develop and assemble its ill-fated audio range. And to push the point a little further, the £1495 F80 looks very much the kind of product the former occupants might have considered had things gone better for them.

Enough mischief: what we have here is an all-in-one unit combining radio, slot-loading player, amplifier and speakers, in what Meridian calls a "transportable" form. It's not quite a portable – it relies on mains power and weighs 6.5kg – but as well as playing your CDs it handles DVD discs and MP3/WMA files, has DAB, FM and AM tuners, and can connect to an iPod, a TV and even a complete surround sound system.

That curvaceous shell, rather art deco in appearance (though I've heard some close to the project referring to it as "the toaster"), contains a sophisticated amplification/speaker system. Three speakers are used – two full-range drivers with neodymium magnets and magnesium/aluminium alloy cones, and a rear-venting subwoofer – and each is driven by an 80W amplifier, and housed in its own inert enclosure. These are made from an alloy-injected composite – one area for which the Ferrari connection was of great assistance.

Digital signal processing tailors the unit's output to its location and provides active equalisation. There's an adjustable bass boost and "tilt" control, adjusting bass and treble relative to each other, plus an adjustment for perceived stereo width.

There's an optical digital output, analogue in and a mini-DIN for iPods, and the system comes with a remote handset to supplement the touch-panel controls around the organic



**No, not a toaster, but a very sophisticated one-box home entertainment system**

LED display. And if you don't subscribe to the "must be red to be a real Ferrari" geekiness, the Meridian also comes in other Ferrari colours: Argento Nurburgring, Gialla Originale, Bianco Avus and Nero.

## PERFORMANCE

Those around the office suggested the yellow review sample on my desk reminded them of anything from an underwater camera to a plastic Swan kettle, so the Meridian needed to persuade the sceptics. And I'm happy to say it delivered on its promise, whether used as a radio, CD player or DVD machine: I tried it as a portable as well as connected to my surround system and large plasma screen TV, and in each case it performed as well as, or better than, I'd hoped.

It really comes into its own as a very advanced second-room system, for a study or the like, where its ability to create a rich, detailed and powerful sound from a relatively small enclosure ensures it has an appeal beyond the styling and brand names. Whether with CD or radio, this is a system to which one could quite happily

listen all day, without a hint of missing anything of significance. The weight and bass control are consistently impressive, and the midband and treble make voices and instruments sound natural and clean, and even deliver fine concert-hall atmosphere.

Even when connected to a TV and used to play DVDs, the Meridian is highly convincing, with a good spread of sound and fine focus. A higher-quality video output would have been better, but the S-video and composite are just about good enough: the picture was acceptable even on a very large screen.

Meridian would have you believe that the F80 is a complete home entertainment system. Having used it for a while I'd say that's not too far wide of the mark: unlike some other attempts to link the automotive and audio worlds, this collaboration has resulted in class, quality and no shortage of performance. Linking up with the prancing horse has allowed Meridian to develop much more than a one-trick pony. ●

## MERIDIAN F80

Type CD/DVD/radio transportable system  
Price £1495

Power output 3x80W (separate amplifiers for each stereo speaker and the subwoofer)

Audio inputs 2 x auxiliary analogue in, iPod input on mini-DIN socket, connected via optional cable

Audio outputs Analogue, optical digital, headphones

Video outputs Composite and S-video

Other connections Mains in, two assignable F-type aerial sockets

Accessories supplied Remote handset, FM/DAB antennae

Dimensions (HxWxD) 23x40.8x18.5cm

Made by Meridian Audio Ltd, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6YE

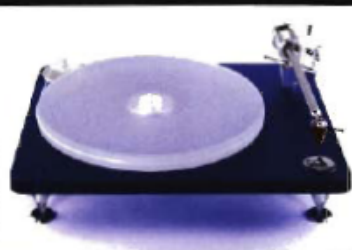
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AUDIO REFERENCE

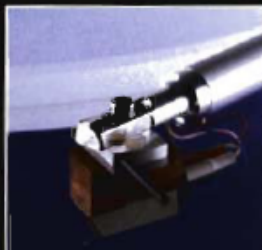
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