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COPLAND CTA405

Widely accomplished amp with a performance to match

Very much the elder statesman in present company, Copland is one of a handful of companies worldwide who've been making valve amps pretty much since their resurgence following the technology's near-abandonment in the 1970s. The company's range is small and has changed slowly over the years, but does include such modern devices as a digital room correction unit alongside this amp. The CTA405 itself, is a classic bit of Copland understatement with nothing obvious (except, after a few minutes, the heat!) giving away the presence of valves.

In fact there are four KT88s under the hood, operating in tetrode mode and run well within their ratings for a notional output of 50 watts. Even so, they generate a lot of heat in a relatively small space and the whole unit runs warmer than those with no valve cage – this one if anything needs even more room to breathe. Small-signal valves are similarly familiar, a pair of high-current 12BH7 and one 12AX7, while the all-valve phono stage (which we were surprised, but delighted to find on board) uses two each of 12AX7 and 6922.

Even the output transformers are inside the case, alongside the toroidal mains transformer. All of the circuitry, including valves, is mounted on printed circuit boards, so in most respects, this is a thoroughly modern amplifier with such refinements as relay-switched inputs and a motorised volume control. The latter is marked in dBs and, although we found the markings hopelessly inaccurate, they're useful as a reference. The amp's remote control also works with Copland's other components and, far more than with any other amp here, we get the feeling that this is an amplifier that just happens to use valves rather than be a valve statement.



SOUND QUALITY

This is definitely one of the most widely accomplished amps in the group. Hardly an area of its performance was not praised at one point or another by our listening panel, with only mild criticism. Perhaps the most telling comment referred to the orchestral track (by Rachmaninov), in which the multiple violins seemed to work together as a unified body without losing their individual existence. That, in a sense, is what music-making is all about and it's very much to Copland's credit that it is so clearly audible through this amp.

The CTA405 also makes a good impression for its sharp, but realistic attack on leading edges of all kinds, from bass drum to piano to vocals. This makes the music really live and keeps the listener's mind alert and, when appropriate, his foot tapping. Tonally, it is very even with an extended and very sweet treble, which was particularly noticeable in the Miles Davis track.

In fact, this is very much a musical rather than technical amplifier. There's good coverage of areas like detail, imaging and rhythm, but overall one's attention is drawn to the music rather than the equipment, which is all to the good. If you are one of those souls who likes their music presented with clinical precision, you may find this amp short-changing you, but we found a lot to like in its balance of detail, tonality and overall listener involvement.

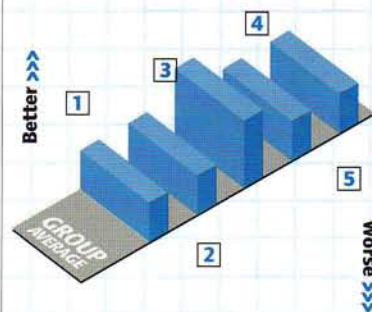
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LAB REPORT

Output comes to just on 50W and only falls to 40W at 20Hz – an excellent result. At 20kHz there's about 15W available, which is fine – real music just doesn't demand full power at such frequencies. Small-signal frequency response is as flat as most solid-state amps we can recall, within two tenths of a dB at most from 20Hz to 20kHz, while the output impedance of 0.9 ohm is low enough to ensure a reasonably flat response into most loudspeakers. Distortion is the lowest in the group in numerical terms under the usual conditions, but seems to fall away a little more slowly with signal level than some and also contains an unusually high level of hum modulation. Noise is very good: despite some preconceptions out there, valves can do well at this and the CTA405's figure is good by any standards. Power consumption is the highest (just) of the lot, roughly £160 a year if left on continuously – so make good use of standby!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +20%
- 2] Frequency response >> +20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +40%
- 4] Distortion >> +20%
- 5] Output impedance >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	50W	50W
Distortion (1 kHz/ 8 ohms)	0.2%	0.7%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.3dB	±0.2dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	Saying that this is a musical and involving amplifier is not a backhanded compliment to its resolving power: it also had considerable insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards.
PRACTICALITY ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★