

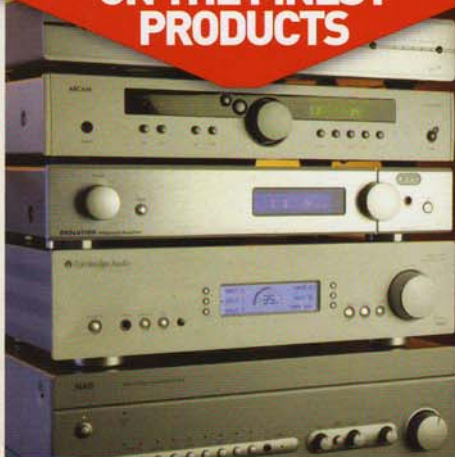
Hi-fi newsTM

PURE AUDIO EXCELLENCE

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August 2007

TOUGH TESTS
ON THE FINEST
PRODUCTS



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- » Audio Analogue Primo VT CD player
- » Origin Live Conqueror tonearm
- » Copland CTA405 valve amp

UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



Nordic by Nature

COPLAND CTA405 (£2498)

It's wall-to-wall valves as Copland squeezes tubes into its phono, line and power amp stages. The Scandinavian summer just got a little hotter...



Tested by Ken Kessler

Copland products are easy to love. Especially if you've had it up to your eyebrows with poorly-made components, absurd ergonomics and a sense that your pocket has been picked. But Copland rests in an arena of its own, for the products send out very mixed signals. Metaphorically, that is: sonically, they've never been less than delightful. What's so odd about Copland is its profile. Are these products, by virtue of performance and price, mid-range between starter kit and crazy high-end? Or are they entry-level high-end because they sound so good and exceed the £1500 barrier? Are they aimed at non-audiophiles because they eschew tweaky codswallop? Or are they strictly for audiophiles because the bulk of them contain valves?

Suffice it to say, the CTA405 integrated amplifier couldn't be more user-friendly and less troublesome if it were valve-free. This unit, straight out of the box, was up and running in five minutes. On one end, Quad's 99CDP II and Marantz CD-12/DA-12 CD players, the Kenwood L-07D turntable with Air Tight moving-coil cartridge and V.Y.G.E.R. Baltic M/SME 312/Transfiguration Orpheus. On the other, Sonus faber Guarneri or LS3/5As. In-between, Yter cables.

PURE AND SIMPLE

Simplicity extends from the system remote, which also operates the company's CD players, to clearly-labelled socketry on the back (including – hurrah! – old-style multi-way speaker terminals). The front couldn't be more straightforward, with only two rotaries for input select and volume, two buttons for tape and stand-by, and a circular panel in the middle with LEDs to indicate source. And for that, there are plenty, including a phono stage beefy enough to accept mid-to-high output moving-coils, four line-level components and tape in both directions. A socket for a 12V trigger is also fitted. Primary on/off is via a rocker on the back, while in



HOT STUFF FROM THE FROZEN NORTH

If there's a Scandinavian stereotype worth perpetuating (and I don't mean gorgeous blondes with long legs), it has to be that IKEA ethos of lean styling and stupendous value for money. For as long as Copland has been around, it has stuck to its Nordic guns and offered hybrid and non-hybrid components with styling unmistakably reminiscent of one of the most desirable brands of the last 30 years: Cello. That's not to diminish Copland's worth, because it's more than just a pretty fascia. But if your VW were mistaken for a Porsche, would you grumble? Looks aside, Copland ticks all the right boxes for both audiophiles and those who prefer not to live masochistically.



normal use the remote or the stand-by button will turn on the power.

Copland 'under-drives' its products, anticipating a long and trouble-free life. Current capacity of the CTA405's power supply and output transformers could deal with 100W/ch output, but this amp is specified conservatively, using very little feedback, at 50W/ch. Even with the hungry Sonus fabers, though, it was more than enough to rock me in my 12 x 18ft listening room.

ENERGY AND FEEL

And rock I most certainly did, with the latest offerings from the Kings of Leon, Chuck E Weiss and others who love their lower registers. However deceptive the compact Guarneris remain after a decade-plus, they deliver satisfying bottom octaves that belie their size. But to do so, they need something driving them hard. And while the Copland would not deliver levels that

ABOVE: Valves to the left (KT88), valves to the right (12BH7 and 12AX7), and valves a'top (12AX7 and 6992, side-mounted)

'The Copland CTA405 addresses and satisfies two usually-opposing motives: what you need versus what you want'

threatened their or my health, at no point were the dynamics compressed nor the bottom octaves starved.

Which is not to say that the CTA405 is primarily a rocker's amplifier – an easy conclusion to reach: it conveyed perfectly the energy and feel of the Kings of Leon's swampy, post-Allmans' rock and the grinding rhythm section on Weiss' *23rd & Stout* [Cooking Vinyl CKV-CD-4783], from the opening notes of the roiling 'Prince Minsky's Lament', with its Tom Waitsian darkness. But the sheer detail tells you that you must use this tool for more than its Wall of Sound potential: the openness and mix of voices on the a capella 'Man Tan' will take your breath away.

Weiss' voice suggests way too many late nights, and the Copland has a field day with his vocal textures. But where it really shines is with the flowing rhythms of his backing band, reminiscent of early Little Feat. If I were one of those truly misguided souls who believes that the music's pace, rhythm and timing were in the playback

AUDIO FILE

Comprehensive, remote-equipped tube hybrid integrated amp with phono stage

Made by:
Copland

Supplied by:
Absolute Sounds

Telephone:
020 8971 3909

Web: www.copland.dk



ABOVE: Inputs include four line, a tape loop and a phono stage. Separate 8ohm and 4ohm taps are provided with chunky, gold-plated speaker connections

system and not the recording, I'd nominate the '405 as that philosophy's poster child. Listen to the flow of 'Sho Is Cold' or 'Fake Dance' and marvel at the way the Copland keeps up with the rhythm patterns.

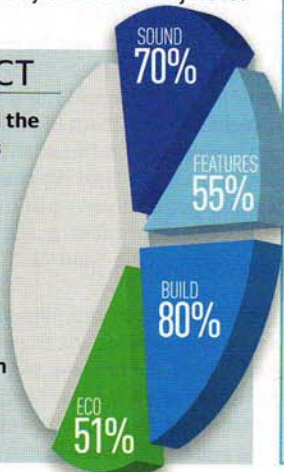
SECRET WEAPON

And there's a secret weapon retailers could use to entice any potential customer: the phono stage is simply terrific if fed a suitable cartridge. Indeed, one of the first tracks I played through the CTA405 was the vinyl *Two Of A Mind* by Paul Desmond & Gerry Mulligan [RCA LSP2624]. A classic RCA session, it possess air and space in abundance, and there's nothing more inviting than a widely-spaced, vintage-stereo performance with plenty of detail to savour. Duelling saxes off vinyl, via valves.

But there's always a clincher, a single recording that gives you the full measure of a component during your initial listening sessions. This time, it was Sundazed's sublime reissue of The Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* [Sundazed/Columbia LP5215]. The clarity of the pedal steel, the stringfest that is 'Pretty Boy Floyd', the nasality of both McGuinn's and Parson's voices – the Copland understands proportion, relative levels, transient decay and everything else that this listener holds dear. If you've reached the stage where you understand, zen-like, that less is more, then maybe you're ready for this no-nonsense approach to audiophile needs. Copland's CTA405 is one of those rare products that addresses *and* satisfies two usually-opposing motives: what you need versus what you want. Buy with confidence. And then try not to twiddle those sensuously tactile knobs just for the sheer hell of it. ☺

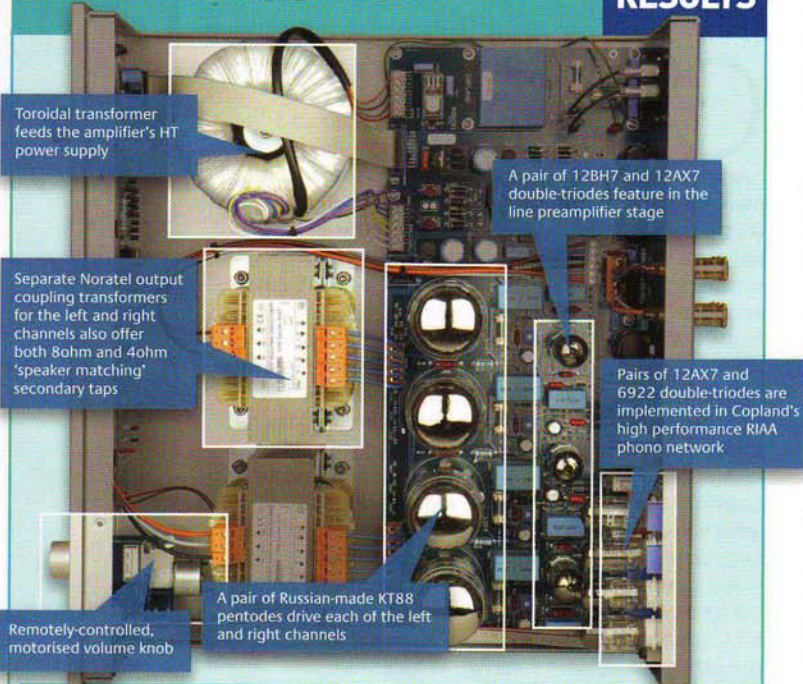
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Copland's CTA405 exhibits all the virtues that makes fools of its rivals: superb build quality, a lack of stupid frills, styling befitting products ten times its price and sound quality that encourages marathon listening sessions. If you have a small-ish room, not-too-hungry speakers and a disdain for bullshit, the CTA405 has your name on it.



COPLAND
CTA405 AMPLIFIER / £2498

Hi-fi news
LAB
RESULTS



HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

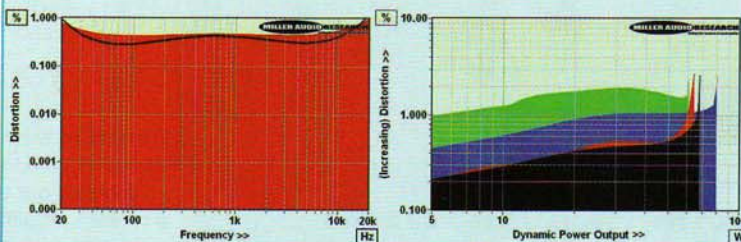
With its significant complement of tubes, the CTA405 runs very warm indeed, drawing a full 195W from the wall before a watt is fired in anger at the speakers. Once it's delivering the rated 50W/8ohm, the amplifier draws 305W from the mains – hence its relatively poor showing in our eco stakes. In practice, it's possible to squeeze some 2x60W/8ohm and 2x56W/4ohm using the 8 and 4ohm taps, respectively, with a maximum 75W delivered under dynamic conditions (into 2ohm) with a more relaxed 2% distortion limit. So the CTA405 remains best suited to easy-load speakers offering a good 89dB+ sensitivity.

Copland suggests a distortion figure of 0.4%, which is about right for midrange frequencies, but the graph below indicates that this increases closer to 1% in the low bass and 1.2% at high treble frequencies.

This graph is plotted with the same vertical axis (a log scale from 0.0001-1.0%) as those in our amplifier group test this month for comparison (see page 56).

Otherwise, the response of the amplifier is almost ruler-flat to 30kHz with an output impedance that's <0.7ohm over the same range. This is a very moderate figure by the standards of some valve amplifiers and is rather less likely to cause major response aberrations with 'real world' loudspeakers.

Stereo separation might seem a little weak at ~48dB/20kHz but the amplifier's S/N ratio is far more impressive at 91.5dB, especially bearing in mind the +39dB overall gain implemented in this design. Readers may download a full QC Suite report for Copland's CTA405 amplifier by logging onto www.hifinews.co.uk and following the links. PM



ABOVE LEFT: Distortion versus frequency at 10W/8ohm (black = left, red infill = right). ABOVE RIGHT: Dynamic power output vs distortion into 8ohm (black), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm loads (green)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power Output, 8/4ohm (<1% THD)	61W/56W
Dynamic Power, 8/4/2/1ohm	67W/61W/75W/60W
Output Impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.65-0.72ohm
Frequency Response (20Hz-100kHz)	-0.2dB to +0.3dB
Input Sensitivity (for 0dBW/50W)	30mV/215mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBW/full output)	91.5dB/106.5dB
Distortion (10W/8ohm, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.29-1.2%