Imagine an alternative dimension, almost exactly the same as our own, but for the tiny detail that humanity has never cottoned on to the use of vacuum tubes. Every facet of engineering has reckoned it’s fantastic value for money. Marvel company founded by Ole Møller in the mid-eighties. It builds products that use valves in its pre and power stages, but in combination with modern design practice in terms of circuits, layouts and materials. The argument goes that by doing so, previously unattainable levels of performance are now within reach. The CTA408 is the flagship of the range and takes Copland’s valve philosophy further than its predecessors. It is built around the KT150 valve, which is a 21st-century innovation and an evolution of the KT88 and an altogether bigger KT84 valve. The ingredients of the Copland could easily give a three-figure power output, but that isn’t the way this integrated is designed to work. The CTA408 is impressively user-friendly for an amplifier built around vacuum tubes. Other than the fact that it won’t produce any sound for about 30 seconds after you turn it on via the standby switch on the front panel or the remote control (having first switched on the mains at the rear) – thanks to a software controlled start up process designed to protect the valves – it behaves in a manner that is entirely in keeping with solid-state rivals at a similar price (see boxout). It is utterly silent at idle and free from any pops or thumps through the speakers as it powers on or off. Copland’s decision to completely enclose the valves – as it does in its other designs – means that this is a big chassis, but one that’s entirely practical in households with small children and pets.

This tube-based integrated offers so much flexibility and performance that Ed Selley reckons it’s fantastic value for money.
Q&A

Ole Møller
Founder and owner, Copland

ES: The CTA408 has been several years in development. Which aspects of its design took the longest to perfect?

Ole: As always, it’s the voicing of the amplifier that takes the most time. During development, the general schematics of the amplifier only deviate a little from the original idea. However, it takes many, many hours of listening and testing to optimise each stage of the amplifier so everything works perfectly together.

What drew Copland to the KT150 valve for the CTA408?

It is exciting that the former 6550/ KT88 platform is still being developed in this day and age. The sheer power and dynamics made possible by a pair of KT150s per channel enables high-end valve amplifiers to attain even greater levels of performance.

How does the soft-start procedure work to protect the valves?

The start-up procedure ensures that the sequence of power engagement for each stage of the amplifier is always in the correct order, no matter what the temperature or the power supply capacitors’ state of charge.

Is this the first time that Copland has used J-FET devices in the phono stage?

We’ve used J-FET devices before – our hybrid CSAs (Copland Synectic Amplifiers) all incorporated J-FETs in the preamp stages.

Is Copland considering the development of any new source equipment to partner the CTA408?

We have no current plans for new equipment to connect to the amplifier’s input terminals. However, regarding the outputs, we are considering a limited production run of the special loudspeakers we use for monitoring at Copland.

The motorised control knobs have a lovely smooth action

The CTA408 delivers a performance that is big, confident and impressively potent

This with the considerable reserves of slam it brings to material, you have a very enticing combination indeed. There are a few solid-state rivals that are capable of an even more ballistic presentation, but they can’t rival those beautiful upper registers.

The news gets even better with a 24/88.2 FLAC of Dead Can Dance’s Rakin, which allows the Copland to show its considerable virtues all at once. The space of the theatre it is performed in and the relationship of the performers to the audience

Conclusion

There may be aficionados of valve engineering that will struggle to see the point of the Copland CTA408. It isn’t a lush or cuddly performer and there are times when it sounds more solid state than many of its transistor-equipped rivals. What it is best seen as is a truly outstanding integrated amp that happens to use valves. Its ability to delight across a huge variety of music, combined with a real-world power output and useful selection of features make this a truly invigorating addition to the roll call of high-end integrated amps and demonstrates just how exceptional the vacuum tube valve phono stage, but having this effortlessly neutral interface between your chosen turntable and amplifier is highly compelling. While the built-in headphone amplifier is perhaps not quite as spectacular, it’s more than up to the job of late-night listening from time to time.