

PLUS C'EST LA CHANGE..



Some things never change! Quad's 909 two channel power amplifier is the latest in the line of the company's famous current dumping designs. Haden Boardman finds it continues the Quad tradition with style.

There are but a handful of quality audio separates that can trace their roots back through nearly three decades, and still offer the kind of measured performance that is up there with the current state of the art. The original Quad 405 power amplifier was an amazing piece of kit, technically a tour de force. Through 405/II and 606, from which the 909 is directly developed, there is a clear and strong family heritage. So is the 909 little more than nineteen seventies amplifier in swish new millennium clothes?

From the outset, the 909 looks to be good value, being priced under a grand and offering oodles of effortless power, claimed to be 140W RMS per channel, this figure virtually doubling in to four ohm 'speakers. Like the 405, the 909 is a compact beast, measuring 321mm wide, 140mm high deep and 240mm deep - and of course featuring bomb proof construction techniques. Input

connections to the rear are either via two phono sockets, or a dedicated Quad link for the 99 pre-amplifier (sadly not compatible with the older 77 range). Output terminals are standard 5-way posts which take 4mm plugs, a detachable IEC mains lead provides power, and the amplifier sports a safety cut-out button, in case of severe overheating or overload.

SOUND QUALITY

My Marantz CD12 and Pioneer DVD 656 (SACD & DVD-A only!), passive preamp and both Dynaudio Contour 1.8s and my own high efficiency loudspeakers were pressed into service, all using Russ Andrews standard power cables and a Purifier. Arguments have raged about the effect of the current dumper in the real world, but one thing is for sure - lots of warm up time is needed. I can see why the power switch is on the back, because you can never turn the thing off! From cold, it was frankly a bit off the pace. After six hours

however, the amp settled down to making some very nice noises indeed.

If you're looking for a big, beefy, 'kick-ass' sound then this is not your amplifier. Rather, it lies on the smooth and restrained side - but some will think too much so. Mid-band is open and articulate, bass smooth and treble tidy enough, but it fails to give that feisty, gutsy sound that many crave from solid-state. Rather it falls between two stalls. In my high efficiency system, the current dumpers would not have a lot to do (93dB/watt speakers do not need much more than 6 watts!) and to be honest it showed. I was expecting the low power Class A amp to have more of an effect, but it still sounded Class B. Sonics were compressed and veiled - everything was there but somehow pushed back into the 'speakers. Still, 'In My Secret Life' from Leonard Cohen's Ten New Songs the 909 gave a very well presented soundstage, with openness and finesse. Some of my usual

torture tracks (Jimmy Smith!) proved the 909 to be sounded tonally smooth yet a tad restrained. Bass was perhaps a bit too light, which underlined its over-polite nature.

Switching loudspeakers to the more demanding Dynaudios gave the amplifier something more to get its teeth into, and it duly rose to the occasion. Here, the Quad seemed to have more get up and go, showing real authority with Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side Of The Moon' when the loud pedal was pushed. This amp has impressive dynamic capabilities, keeping firm control of the difficult Dynaudios. At higher levels, bass and dynamic balance became far more alive – the amplifier loves to flex its muscles! Although it works better at high volumes into more demanding loads, the tonality is such that it suits smooth jazz more than big beats. Playing Charlie Haden's 'Nocturne' (which is a competent, but unchallenging recording), the 909 shone. Smooth, effortless and easy, through out it gave good levels of detail with decent clarity.

The key to Quad's 909 is solid, fuss-free performance – and 'twas ever thus the way. In some respects it left me wanting more, though – it delivered a thoroughly solid performance, but there was a degree of 'English reserve' that lost a little of the music's emotion. Perhaps this is to miss the point, however. In truth, the 909 embodies the traditional Quad virtues of rock-solid dependability and safe, smooth sound. It will clearly go on to give many years of service. A worthy successor to the 405 and 606, the 909 represents

fine value, especially as part of a QUAD system.

Quad 909 £899.99

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QUAD 405 – THE GENUINE ARTICLE

The first award winning current dumping amplifier was the 405, introduced over a quarter of a century ago. The last ones rolled off the production line around twelve years ago (it was still listed along side the 606 for a while, and interestingly, was actually around 10% more expensive!) and have found homes not just in our front rooms, but in recording studios and night clubs. For many, it was the reference amplifier, boasting technical perfection in a small neat enclosure.

The earliest models featured a 4 pin DIN input socket, spring clip speaker terminals and an IEC mains socket, but most owners seem to have taken a drill to the back and fitted phono sockets! The final versions featured decent phono sockets and good quality banana speaker terminals. The amplifier did become the Quad 405/II but, interestingly, not a lot seems to have been done! Rumour has it that the operation points of the current dumping circuit were changed, the Mk I delivering full power into eight ohms, and half of that in to four. With modern loudspeakers drawing more current the 405 was at a disadvantage so the Mk II delivered more power in to four ohm loads.

Comparing the 405 to the 909 is surprising, inasmuch as just how similar these two amplifiers sound! The 405 has nowhere near the grunt and authority of the 909, but the midband and treble is close. If anything, it's a touch more open than the 909 and more involving – although this could be more down to twenty years of running in! The 405 sounds like a small 909; not bad for a twenty five year old amplifier...

WHAT IS CURRENT DUMPING?

This has always been controversial in audio circles. In very simple terms, the output section has two halves, one is a small Class A power amplifier of exceptional quality, but only around 6 watts output, and a more powerful Class B amplifier of good, but not outstanding quality. The input of this is wired up from the output of the smaller Class A amplifier. Through the use of a bridge circuit, incorporating both negative and positive feedback, the smaller amp has the dominant effect on sound quality. It controls the larger Class B amplifier so it literally 'dumps' current on top of its own output when the extra grunt is required. The feedback circuits make sure the whole thing is tied together in a seamless (i.e. distortion-free) fashion. As a bonus, the amplifier will not be affected by more difficult loads, in theory the current dumpers will just adjust accordingly.

Quad claims its current dumpers are virtually perfect, the signal presented to the input terminals will be exactly the same as the one on the output terminals, but amplified. As a circuit goes, it has a hell of a lot going for it, it even won a Queen's award for technical innovation, and of course this beast is totally stable in to any of the Quad electrostatic loudspeakers.

THE EDITOR SAYS

To coin that well worn phrase, this amplifier is all about 'traditional values in a modern setting'. It doesn't set the world alight with its sublime emotional fluency, or amaze with its entrancing musicality. Rather, it provides oodles of clean, fuss-free power that's tonally smooth and sweet. It images decently, goes loud when called upon so to do, and isn't afraid of any loudspeaker you present it with. This is precisely why people have always bought Quad power amplifiers. If these admirable characteristics – plus the company's peerless customer service and product support – appeal, then you'll love it. If not, look elsewhere.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The compact 909 stereo power amplifier produces a healthy 120watts into 8ohms and 200watts into 4ohms, plenty enough for high volume levels through all loudspeakers. Only in the largest rooms would power like this be insufficient.

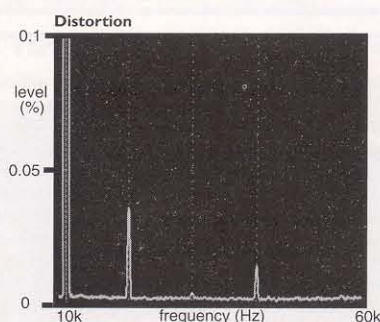
Frequency response extended from 7Hz up to 33kHz (-1dB), wide enough for 24/96 stereo if need be, although more extension is needed for 24/192. A roll off at this low-ish frequency usually helps toward a

sound free from obvious brightness.

Also contributory to a smooth sound are low distortion figures and an even-order spectrum at all power levels, like the one shown here. The 909 produced mainly second harmonic, plus a little fourth harmonic. **NK**

Power 120watts
CD/tuner/aux.
Frequency response 7Hz-33kHz
Separation 77dB
Noise -109dB

Distortion 0.01%
Sensitivity 700mV
dc offset 0.1/0.1mV



World Verdict £

Clean, open and powerful but not the most incisive or engaging at the price. Nonetheless, Quad owners will find it is an ideal upgrade for their ageing 405s.