

Exposure 3010S2



Most famous for its big black pre-power amplifier combinations of the 1980s, Exposure traditionally sold to people who wanted punchy solid-state amps that sounded smoother and creamier than rival Naims. Nowadays, the sound hasn't changed much but the size has and most of its wares are more affordable products such as this – Exposure's top integrated.

It's a nice device, with a decent finish and clear ergonomics – unlike the fiddly Rega, for example. Styling is pretty conventional; its fascia is a thick slab of brushed aluminium and the knobs have a smooth and silky action. Like most others here it has six inputs, but is unusual for having an MM/MC phono module option.

The manufacturer says much attention has been paid to squeezing the best sound out of the circuitry. To this end, special capacitors feature in the signal path and the circuit topology has been mapped with a view to keeping signal and power supply paths short. Cascode circuitry is used for improved power supply immunity, says Exposure, and there's a fast bipolar transistor output stage with high quality relays fitted in the preamplifier section.

A NATURAL EASE

Right from the off, the Exposure proved a highly impressive performer, offering a well rounded tonality that sat bang in the middle of the group. Others like the Naim were rather a lot brighter, whereas the Rega sounded appreciably warmer. As well as its lovely even balance, it was big-hearted and bold; the stereo soundstage was



spacious and the amp had lots of easily delivered power on tap. The result was an expansive rendition of Peter Gabriel's 'Humdrum'. But it wasn't all about size, because the 3010S2 had delicacy and detail in spades. The rich, sonorous timbre of the piano was lovely, the instrument coming across in all its ringing glory.

The all-electronic 4hero track didn't change this impression; here we had a crisp and open midband able to throw up every element of the mix into sharp relief, but it didn't sound edgy or forced in any way. Rather, the music flowed with a natural ease that most of the others here lacked.

By comparison, the clear and explicit Nait XS2 didn't gel as well, sounding a little less natural, while the Rega made the recording feel slightly opaque and veiled.

The Exposure went on to showcase Randy Crawford's beautiful vocal chords, and conjured up a wonderfully relaxed yet stirring performance dripping with feel. Indeed, this amplifier has no weak points at all – and is also very strong in most areas. This makes it a truly satisfying way to play music, much more than its price would suggest.

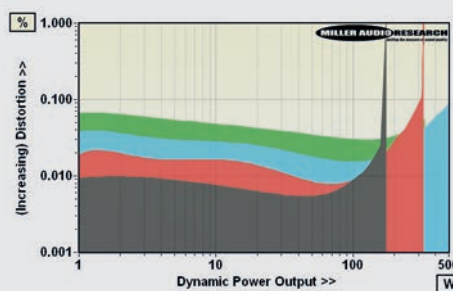
Sound Quality: 85%



ABOVE: One of the more minimalist amps here, source selection and volume knobs are your lot. However, they have a fine, silky action and the brushed alloy fascia looks sleek

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Distortion really does decrease as the 3010S2 is left to warm up – from 0.015% to 0.010% over 30 minutes at 10W/8ohm. Once toasty, the 3010S2 holds to ~0.01% from 1-100W/8ohm although THD in our sample did increase more sharply through the treble via the right channel (0.020% vs. 0.10%, L/R). As for power output, the 3010S2 beats its rated 110W at 2x135W and 2x225W into 8/4ohm with sufficient dynamic headroom to accommodate 175W, 325W and a huge 555W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads [see Graph, below]. Output is short-circuit protected to 335W (18.3A/1ohm) but it's still the beefiest amp in our test and very tolerant of difficult speakers. Output impedance is also usefully lower than with previous-generation Exposure amps at 0.017ohm while the frequency response holds true to within ±1dB from 8Hz-23kHz. The 80dB S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is a little lower than average but this is white noise rather than hum and likely to have a flattering subjective influence. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm loads (green)

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	135W 225W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	175W 325W 555W 30W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.017-0.032ohm
Frequency response (20Hz-100kHz)	-0.16dB to -12.7dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/110W)	25mV 265mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/110W)	80.4dB 100.8dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.005-0.027%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	23W 265W
Dimensions (WHD)	440x115x300mm



ABOVE: In addition to six RCA line inputs, the Exposure's back panel offers two sets of preamp outputs for bi-wiring, and two pairs of speaker outputs, plus IEC mains in

GROUP TEST VERDICT

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Sonically, the NAD C 390DD was never less than pleasing. Open, even and spacious, it proved a polished performer but fell down the rankings thanks to its rather matter of fact, emotionally uninspiring sound. Still, many prospective purchasers will still find it appealing because of its power, operational flexibility and upgradeability – although few are likely to buy it for its looks or finish.

The Moon 250i was a very nice amplifier indeed. One of the best balanced here, it didn't have any breathtaking strengths or glaring weaknesses, appearing instead to do most things very well. In terms of tonal balance and general transparency it was excellent: highly neutral with no quirks or foibles. There was a lot of low-level detail and stereo imaging was good too.

The trouble came with fast, propulsive music where it dragged its feet a little in the bass, which tended to slow things down. If you're a fan of more sedate, acoustic programme material, however, you will rank this amplifier more highly.

CHARM AND CHARACTER

The Elicit-R was typically Rega – a loveable, charming and rather eccentric product. Beautifully built with interesting styling, it was let down by a slightly imprecise volume control. It was riotously good fun to listen to, but nowhere near as transparent as some of the others. While it sounded emotionally engaging and musically convincing, it clouded out rather too much low-level detail along the way. Some listeners might rank it higher than third place, others lower – it's all down to taste.

Naim's new Nait XS2 was another big character. In a great many respects it is excellent. Firstly, its styling and build quality are undeniably impressive for a product

of this price – it feels like a slice of the high-end that has been shrunken down, rather than the other way round.

Secondly, its sound is distinctive and in many ways superb. Soundstaging is breathtakingly wide and stereo images are served up very accurately within. It has a highly detailed and very propulsive sound that consistently pushes the musical performance with real zeal.

Yet curiously the Naim just doesn't seem able to gel everything together quite as well as either the

Rega or Exposure. The Nait may also sound a little bright with more edgy speakers, so careful listening would be needed for a synergistic match.

And so this month's champion is Exposure's 3010S2. Here is an

amplifier that suffers none of the foibles of the lower ranking amps yet has a special charm all of its very own. Big-hearted, powerful and expansive, every type of music played through the Exposure gets a good airing.

A COHESIVE BLEND

It's able to communicate very well in hi-fi terms (soundstaging, depth perspective, detail, dynamics, etc) yet blends it all together cohesively. Like the Moon it's a just a fraction on the warm side of neutral, never

erring far enough to impose its character on the music. As such, it sounds great across a wide variety of music and the Exposure will work with a good spread of loudspeakers too. ⏻

'The Exposure sounds big-hearted, powerful and expansive'



ABOVE: Rega's Elicit-R (bottom) is typically charming and a sumptuous listen. Naim's Nait XS2 (middle) adds fantastic soundstaging and detail, while Exposure's 3010S2 proves a brilliant, consummate all-rounder and worthy winner

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