



DETAILS
PRODUCT
 Exposure 3010S2-D
ORIGIN
 UK/China
TYPE
 Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
 12kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 440 x 115 x 300mm
FEATURES
 • Quoted power output: 2x 110W (8ohms)
 • 6x RCA line inputs inc AV bypass
 • Optional DAC module
 • Optional MM or MC phono stage module
 • Preamp output
DISTRIBUTOR
 Exposure Electronics Ltd
TELEPHONE
 01273 423877
WEBSITE
 exposurehifi.com



Back to the future

Amplifier buyers now demand digital connectivity, which is why Exposure has updated its 3010S2 integrated, says **David Price**

Times change and fashions with it. The integrated amplifier is just as susceptible to these as any, and so we have seen a number of new designs in the past year or two that feature a far wider range of facilities than their predecessors. It seems that people buying integrated amplifiers in 2015 no longer expect or indeed want the stripped-down minimalism that first came into vogue in the eighties. Nowadays, the breed needs to have digital functionality available to its customers, should they desire it. Exposure is the latest company to recognise this, in its update of its excellent 3010S2.

I must confess I am a big fan of this amp. I first heard it several years ago, when it won a *Blind Listening Group Test* (HFC 373). It was admittedly by a narrow margin, but the point was that it went against what I believed to be the invincible Creek Destiny 2. The Creek bettered the Exposure in a couple of respects, and the Exposure sneaked ahead in a few more; but previously every other amplifier I had heard at or near the price of the Creek was roundly trounced by it. This shows you just how good the Exposure was. Will the fourth incarnation of Exposure's top integrated amp sacrifice sound at the altar of added convenience? The

challenge for its designer is to manage any extra functionality without letting it interfere with all that was good about its predecessor.

Board walk

The price goes up from £1,495 to £1,700, and this accounts for the new 'D' suffix, indicating its readiness for the optional new plug-in DAC board. This costs £375 and offers PCM at up to 24/192 resolution, plus DSD64, and comes with USB and BNC inputs between which it auto-switches. All this is possible thanks to the Wolfson WM8742 DAC chip, which is at its heart. Vinyl fans aren't forgotten either; there's also an optional £240

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Phono/aux 1 input
- 2 Earthing point
- 3 Bi-wiring shrouded speaker terminals
- 4 Pre outputs

onboard phono stage, in moving magnet or moving coil flavours.

The 3010S2-D is a well screwed together product at the price with a solid aluminium casing with extruded front panel and metal knobs – now available in a choice of silver or black finishes. Although not quite as swish feeling as a Japanese-built Marantz is, it has a Land Rover-like solidity. It's claimed to put out 110W RMS per channel, and certainly listening tests bear this out. It runs cool and silent, and is less fussy to use than many.

Sound quality

I kick the listening session off with Congo Ashanti's *Days Chasing Days*, a lovely slice of mid-paced, late seventies reggae that sounds clean and smooth on practically anything you play it through. Still, it can seem a little anodyne, and the 3010S2 didn't quite capture it in its full glory. Because the track ambles along, not really going anywhere, it could sound a little uninvolved after you had got over the pleasantly powerful and smooth sound. The D model, again fed by a high-quality CD source, proves altogether more engaging.

It's a subtle sensation, but a meaningful one. There's a sense of the midband being better resolved; it seems a little less opaque and is able to drill down into the fine detail of the mix slightly better. Because so much is going on at this level, it becomes all the more enjoyable for it. Once the amplifier has warmed through for an hour or three, you really begin to appreciate the higher resolution afforded by the new design. It doesn't sound harsher or harder in any way, yet the recorded acoustic appears at once better lit and more vibrant. The result is a lovely, bouncy rendition of a great track; I am particularly impressed by the extra stage depth and the smoothness to the vocals. The previous S2 could sound ever so slightly 'metal plated' through the upper midband, giving a

crispness to instruments that otherwise wouldn't have it. But its successor brings detail and depth to the sound that seems to nullify this; instruments appear slightly more three dimensional and less artificial.

Move to a more upbeat piece of music in the shape of The Motors' *Forget About You*, and the Exposure picks up its skirts and runs, so to speak. It is a fast sounding design, one that seems a little more fleet of foot than its predecessor. Again, the difference is not vast, but I discern a greater sense of involvement, a feeling that the new amp is able to start and stop fractionally faster than before. Bass guitar lines seem to flow fractionally better, giving a more fluid feel. There's a greater sense of involvement that makes the

It crystallises everything that's good about the Exposure sound

Exposure even more fun to listen to than before; indeed its predecessor begins to seem ever so slightly wooden by comparison. The thick, compressed, crowded midband that the song offers up proves no match for the 3010S2-D, which is able to scythe through it in an imperious manner. It throws out lots of detail and delivers a believable, three-dimensional recorded acoustic – something its forebear was a little less adept at, and also something that very few amplifiers of this price seem to be able to do.

Staying with the analogue line inputs, it's time to try a vinyl source. A Michell GyroDec/TecnoArm tracking a Lyra Delos makes a very nice noise indeed from my original first generation Charisma pressing of *Trick Of The Tail* by Genesis. *Mad Man Moon* is a joy, my 30-year old



HOW IT COMPARES

Coming in at £1,500, Creek's Evolution 100A is one of the closest rivals. It's a brand new design, has optional plug-in boards and offers exactly the same 110W RMS power output. Sonically, there is a lot of common ground between them. Both are clean sound modern transistor amplifiers with lots of power and detail, yet are smooth and subtle too. There's none of the fizz or mush of lesser, cheaper solid-state amplifiers, and they're satisfyingly rhythmic too. In absolute terms, I would say the Exposure just about pips the Creek, but others may disagree. It has a slightly meatier sound, and a better sense of space and bass grip, but the Creek is a little softer and more romantic, which may suit some listeners a little better.

A highly focused hi-fi product with the minimum of frills – available in black also

record sounding beautiful. As always when I listen to good vinyl, I am struck by the massive and immersive soundstage, as if everything is larger than life. It is smooth too, and wonderfully detailed. You're well aware that you're listening to something that's not entirely neutral, yet the Exposure sounds so engaging and inviting that it's almost a crime not to play black plastic through it. It is as if the 3010S2-D has – ironically – been destined to flourish via vinyl, despite its 'digital' designation!

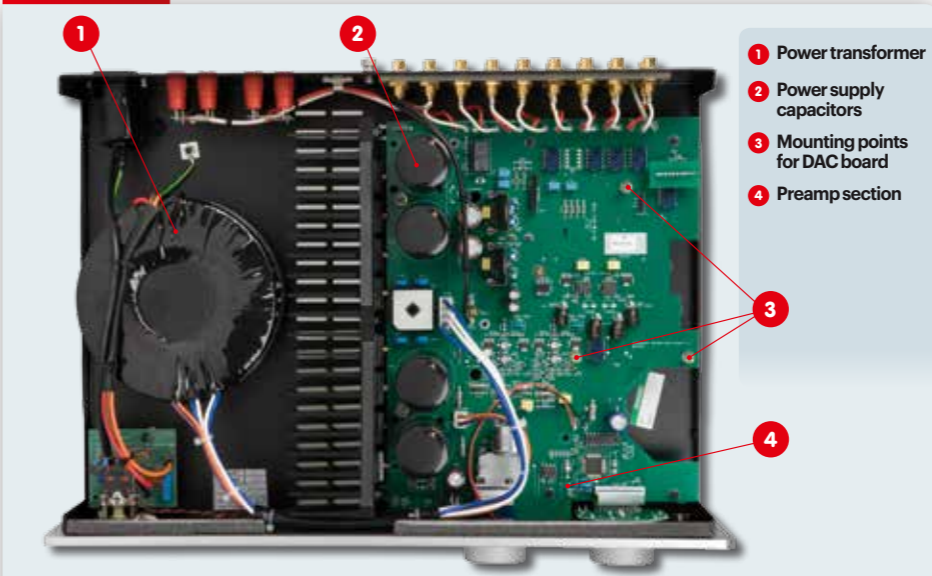
Plug and play

Still, a key *raison d'être* of the new amplifier is, of course, that plug-in digital audio board, so Kraftwerk's *Electric Cafe* is duly fired up, only to reveal a seriously good sound from 16-bit/44kHz. Let's be clear about this; the £350 digital card is certainly no match for the £9,000 dCS Debussy DAC that I normally use, but what really surprises me is just how musically enjoyable the Exposure's new board is. There is definitely the sense that you are listening to a Wolfson converter; it is bright and crisp and even with no undue harshness anywhere.

Techno Pop from the same band sounds well lit and punchy, with sledgehammer bass and sparkling highs, plus a detailed midband that catches the song's many electronic instrumental strands well. Again it works very well as a package, appearing to deliver a performance that is greater than the sum of the parts. Indeed, this song is a great workout for the Exposure, showcasing its large reserves of power and its willingness to use them. It thumps out a staggeringly deep bass, yet this is still fast and focused, which makes it all the more enjoyable.

Next up, my MacBook Pro running Audirvana Plus is introduced to the 3010S2-D, via the USB input. I click on a 24-bit/96kHz version of Wings' *Band On the Run* and settle down.

INSIGHT



ALL CHANGE

The new Exposure is more than just a 3010S2 with the option of a few plug-in boards. Designer Tony Brady has actually gone through it and made a number of significant tweaks to the circuitry. The preamp board now has discrete components where there were previously some integrated circuits used. It offers six line-level

inputs, and one of these is now a direct AV input to enable integration within a surround sound system. A preamp output means that you can power an external power amplifier, and/or bi-amp your system should you so wish. Instead of using the MOSFET output devices, the power amp has a bipolar transistor output

stage, and a new power supply adds extra stages of regulation for improved performance, the company says. The chunky loudspeaker terminals are doubled to allow bi-wiring. As you would expect, careful attention has been paid to the design of the circuitry, to keep signal and power supply paths short.

Again the Exposure excels itself, sounding very enjoyable on this classic early seventies rock track. There is a fine sense of air and space in the studio, and lovely silky smoothness to Paul McCartney's vocals and a wonderful warmth to the proceedings; you can almost taste the air at Abbey Road Studios in West London! Aside from all the impressive hi-fi aspects, what I enjoy the most is the way that the music just flows along in a wonderfully easy yet entertaining way. There is no sense of the song sounding stilted in any way; the digital board sounds good with CD-quality digital audio, but really raises its game on a well recorded high-resolution digital music file. Everything about the song is natural and believable; of course a high-end, and highly expensive off-board DAC gives more detail, dynamics and drive, but the Exposure's plug-in module works way better than it has any right to given the cost – and so should be considered a valuable optional extra.

Conclusion

The price tag may have risen by a few hundred pounds, but this has done very little to compromise the Exposure 3010S2-D's value for

money. Indeed you might argue that it is an ever better package now, because that sound takes a subtle but significant step forward.

This company does solid-state amplification really well in my view, and always has done so. This new integrated shows why; it crystallises everything that's good about the Exposure sound down into one simple, versatile package. From a single, modestly sized box you get a fast, powerful sound that's highly involving to listen to, yet it is tonally smooth and neutral enough to let you listen for long periods on end. Highly recommended ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Superbly powerful, crisp, musical sound

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Still lacks flexibility compared with rivals

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: Worthwhile update to a brilliant mid-price integrated

FEATURES



OVERALL



Q&A

David Denyer
Exposure Hi-Fi PR



DP: Is the new 3010S2-D more than just the old amp with new cards?

DD: Yes, of course the new functionality offered by the digital board is an important feature, but key to the new amplifier's performance improvement is a new preamplifier board, which now uses entirely discrete transistors along with some additional stages of regulation. This creates a significant performance upgrade, regardless of whether you're interested in any of the optional cards.

Why use bipolar output transistors instead of MOSFET modules?

We believe discrete bipolar circuitry is more linear and more consistent than power modules, and this translates to a superior sonic performance – although the measured performance is broadly similar. That is why the 3010S2 also used these, and is one of the factors that contributes to the amplifier's fine sound. The two versions (old and new) of the 3010 don't measure identically, but they are not so different because the amplifier is set up the same way in terms of gain and frequency response.

Do you have any plans to offer an aptX Bluetooth input?

Many premium-priced integrated amplifiers are now doing this, but Exposure does not see this as an important feature going forward. The 3010S2-D remains a highly focused hi-fi product with the minimum of frills. This contributes to its excellent sound.

