

Maximum Exposure



Exposure's new 3010S2-D now comes with the option of digital inputs – and also sounds better than ever, says Jon Myles.

The optional digital input board can be seen top right. Small but potent and well worth the price.

Exposure amplifiers have a well-deserved reputation for punching well above their weight – and none more so than the 3010S2. A classically minimalist integrated featuring just volume and source select controls on the fascia plus six line-level inputs, it produced a healthy power output and became renowned for providing exceptional

value on a sound-for-your-pound basis.

But times move on and customers are increasingly demanding greater flexibility from their components – especially in an age when digital music replay is no longer just restricted to CD. So Exposure has responded with the updated 3010S2-D.

The D stands for the fact that the new 3010S2 has the option of allowing the buyer to have a digital input board fitted – which is built around a Wolfson WM8742 DAC chip and offers PCM replay at up to 24/192 resolution as well as DSD 64 via USB and BNC inputs.

In addition, you can also specify either an MM or MC phono-stage board to be fitted – meaning the new 3010S2-D can be configured to your exact requirements. In its basic form the 3010S2-D costs £1700. The DAC board will add an extra £375 while the phono-stage comes in at £240.

But these aren't the only

improvements to the original model.

There's also a new pre-amplifier section featuring discrete transistors and a redesigned power supply aimed at improving performance. And with 136 Watts per channel on tap the Exposure is easily able to drive almost any loudspeakers you pair it with.

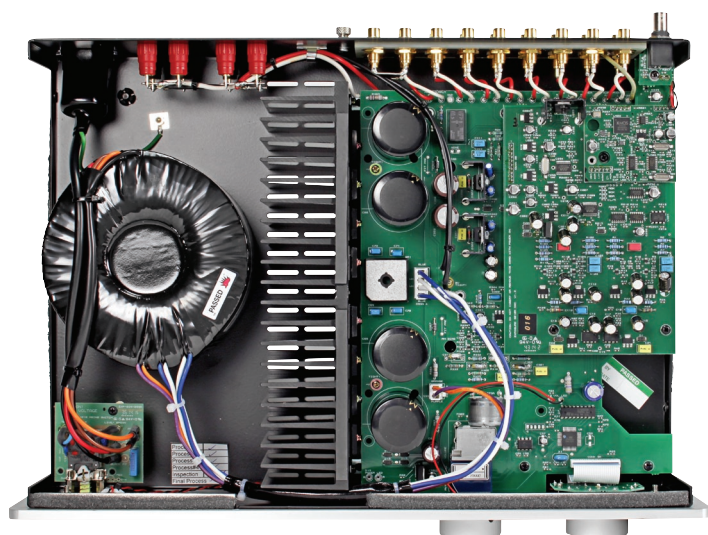
Added to these features is an AV input for integration with a surround system while a pre-amp output also gives the option of powering an external power amp.

Not that you'd know this from the outside however – because the Exposure still retains its minimalist look. Which means the standard volume and selector rotary controls, power button and IR sensor. It looks good and purposeful and feels reassuringly well-built for the price.

SOUND QUALITY

Slot the new Exposure into your system and you'll immediately get a great big smile on your face. For – like its predecessor – the 3020S2-D majors on musical connectivity.

The midband is very well resolved, bass sounds bouncy without being too



forward, while there is a good stage depth to the overall sound.

Playing Bjork's 'Black Lake' the Exposure had the ability to really dig out low frequencies. Some amplifiers struggle with this track due to its density but the Exposure seemed to take it in its stride. Not only that, it throws out an expansive soundstage. Vocals went way beyond the height and width of the speakers and had tremendous detail.

Switching to something a little more detailed such as Kraftwerk's live 'Minimum-Maximum' collection the Exposure captured the ambience of the various venues extremely well. Listening to the start of 'Autobahn' I could hear the atmosphere in the hall. Then, once the electronic bass kicked in, there was a realism and three-dimensionality to the sound that – while not exactly valve-like – certainly lacked the electronic edge of some other transistor designs. It was immersive and captivating – which is what a good amplifier should be.

Moving over to the 3010S2-D's digital input via USB on a MacBook Air running Audirvana Plus, it became obvious Exposure has not stinted on this aspect of this design.

Playing Daft Punk's 'Random Access Memories' via the digital input

revealed much greater depth, vibrancy and definition on the 88/24 download than a standard CD rip. Everything became more natural, crisper and had a greater sense of flow.

The start of 'Lose Yourself To Dance' sounded emphatically more sinuous and propulsive while the vocals and lower registers on 'Contact' displayed a silky smoothness that made the effort of connecting a computer to the Exposure worthwhile.

Staying with the MacBook and going through a selection of high-resolution tracks proved the Exposure's digital board is no slouch. Actually, it's very impressive. 'Man On The Moon' by REM (24/96) was very detailed. The leading edges of Peter Buck's guitar were not just highlighted, they positively rang. Similarly the bass took on better resolution than I get through silver disc. The only criticism to be made is that the DAC section seemed a little fussy about connections – a good quality cable being needed to get the best from high-resolution material.

And no, there's not quite the overall silky smoothness and outright definition you'll get from an outboard DAC equipped with something like the excellent ESS Sabre32 convertor –

but that costs much more. Instead, at its price the Exposure option works a lot better than I had expected and was a very tempting digital option.

With analogue alone the basic 3010S2-D is, at heart, an outstanding amplifier for the price. It gets on with the job in an inherently musical manner, managing to get the most out of all genres of music. It had the timing and definition to let me hear the interplay between individual musicians. With pounding rock or dance it raised itself to the task without missing a beat, having a propulsive thrust that was truly infectious I found.

It may not look the flashiest amplifier at the price, but it's the sound that counts and on that score the new Exposure scores highly.

CONCLUSION

The new 3010S2-D is an excellent update of what was already a very accomplished integrated amplifier. It has depth, definition and detail, allied to ample reserves of power, while the addition of the optional digital board brings welcome flexibility. For the price it's a bit of a bargain.



Exposure's remote does the job – but feels a little flimsy.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Exposure 3010S2-D delivered 136 Watts into 8 Ohms and 240 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it has plenty of punch – a traditional strength of Exposures. A high damping factor of 48 ensures it provides good bass cone damping too, meaning tight bass quality.

Exposure roll off high-end frequency response – like Naim – output falling away above 25kHz. Although this is outside the audio band it will make the 3010S2-D perceptibly less shiny bright than wideband designs. With high frequency distortion comprising mostly second harmonic, the amplifier will have smooth, mild sounding treble.

Our review sample had no phono stage, but instead a digital input with a single S/PDIF electrical input via BNC, and USB. Both worked to 192kHz – but only just; a good cable was needed to support the high data rate, suggesting low input receiver sensitivity. Increasing test input from 1V to 2V helped, but you cannot do this with consumer equipment of course. Results were best at 44.1kHz and multiples of this sampling rate (88.2, 176.4), an EIAJ Dynamic Range value

of 112dB being good, if not exceptional. Distortion at -60dB with 24bit was low at 0.06%, USB and S/PDIF giving identical results. Distortion with CD was as expected, measuring 0.23%. Analogue frequency response was curtailed to 25kHz by the amplifier section.

The 3010S2-D measured well, but the S/PDIF input was cable/connector sensitive at 192kHz sample rate, if not at lower sample/data rates. NK

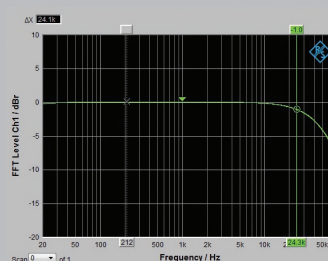
Power	136watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	8Hz-24.3kHz
Separation	86dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion (1W,10kHz)	0.13%
Sensitivity	300mV
Damping factor	48

Digital	
Frequency response (-1dB)	
24/192	20Hz-25kHz

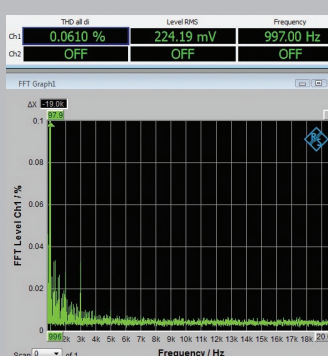
Distortion	24bit
0dB	0.002%
-60dB	0.06%
Separation (1kHz)	98dB

Noise (IEC A)	-110dB
Dynamic range	112dB

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION 24bit



EXPOSURE
3010S2-D £1700
(DAC BOARD £375,
PHONO-STAGE
£240)



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

A no-nonsense integrated amplifier that has a sound quality which belies its relatively modest price. The addition of the optional DAC board adds to its flexibility.

FOR

- punchy sound
- powerful
- detailed
- DAC and phono-stage options

AGAINST

- insensitive digital input

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