

Exposure 5010 pre/monos

Sharing the same chassis design as its 3010 series, but boasting double the clout, Exposure's latest pre/power also offers modular MM/MC phono and DAC options
 Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Available with silver ('titanium') or black front panels, both with black main casework, Exposure's 5010 models replace the rather more overtly styled – and huge – MCX series, with their large outrigger feet, as the company's flagship models. They sit atop a range running from the entry-level 1010 series through the 2010S2s and 3010S2s [HFN Dec '14], with the half-width XM lineup as an alternative [HFN Apr '18]. This top-end range is kept much simpler than its junior counterparts, for where those lineups extend to disc players and integrated amps, here we have just two models: the £2000 5010 preamp, and the £4550-per-pair 5010 mono power amps.

MODULAR OPTIONS

In many ways the 5010 is the 3010S2 writ large, with double the power of the 3010S2 monoblocks claimed for the 5010 mono power amps, at 200W apiece, and the commonality emphasised by the fact the same optional DAC input board (£370) fits both the 3010S2D integrated, and the 3010S2D and 5010 preamps. That board offers a coaxial input handling formats up to 192kHz/24-bit, in addition to a USB port that adds DSD64 via DoP. The 5010 preamp can also accept a choice of MM or MC phono boards, at £265 apiece, replacing one of the existing six line-ins (including a tape loop) fitted on the preamp as standard.

The modular design makes the boards a simple self-fit. It's just a question of removing the lid, and then replacing a jumper board with the chosen module, and this design means there's no need for any menus or set-up – the 'aux' input just becomes whichever board is inserted. However, this does mean that you can have either one of the phono inputs or the digital one, but not both.

RIGHT: 'Old school' power amp design done right – the 5010 monoblocks feature four pairs of high current output transistors mounted on an internal heatsink [centre] and fed from a huge linear PSU with 100V/100,000µF caps

That's all part of the simplicity here, although the pre is flexible when it comes to outputs, having two sets of RCAs and a pair of balanced XLRs. Within the high-quality casework, the preamp is pretty simple, but solidly engineered. It's built around a 200W transformer, with high-speed rectifiers and 24 smoothing caps, while the audio section is DC-coupled using servos and Class A buffering at the output, and just one capacitor at the input, with relay switching for input selection to keep the signal paths as short as possible.

As our inside shot reveals [see below], the 5010 mono power amp is similarly elegant, if superficially 'old school' in its design, with an 800W power transformer, custom-designed like that in the preamp, and massive smoothing capacitors downstream of the dual rectification. A pushbutton selects between the RCA and balanced XLR inputs, and the amp is DC coupled throughout, with

cascade circuits for the input and second amplifier stages for improved linearity and power supply isolation, and no fewer than eight bipolar transistors per channel feeding the two sets of 4mm socket speaker outputs. Non-invasive overload and thermal protection is provided, and the amplifier also has a slow-start system on power-up to avoid surges.

'Music thunders at full charge while delighting with its clarity'

SIMPLE ROUTE

If all that makes the 5010s sound very simple, you're not too wide of the mark, for in an age of amplifiers with built-in streaming, multiple layers

of menus to select everything from input trims to AV passthrough, and prominent front-panel displays, the 5010 pre and power amps are like being transported back to the early days of the company, some four decades ago. While many manufacturers may spend hundreds of hours and an order of magnitude more cash improving the 'user interface' of their



products, Exposure achieves the same thing by losing – or rather not providing – any complications.

NO-NONSENSE AUTHORITY

With real solidity about their build, despite the fact they're not exactly hefty, the 5010s therefore have a sense of no-nonsense intent about them before you play a single note. And as PM's lab report shows [see p69], that's more than backed up by extremely low noise and distortion along with more than enough headroom to ensure the amps can drive just about any speakers you might throw at them.

CLASSICAL DESIGN

Purposeful, frill-free or agricultural? Take your pick, but there's a definite simplicity about the looks of Exposure's products – as there has always been right back to the original models penned by founder John Farlowe, with their square-cut casework, rocker power switches, and Roman numeral designations. But then Exposure maintains the great tradition of no-frills British amplifiers, all the way from the likes of the original Audiolabs and Naims through to brands such as Creek and Cyrus. Simple, yet highly effective, has long been the way, and the 5010s show the wisdom of such an approach. Yes, the latest designs are a little softer, with rounded edges to the thick front-panels and controls, a styling line across the lower part of the 5010 monoblocks and a pushbutton in place of that rocker, but still there's not that much on display. The 5010 preamp has no more than volume and source selection controls, plus a window for its IR handset, which duplicates the fascia controls and adds mute as well as controls for CD players and the like. All you get on the power amps is that on/off button!

Certainly the 5010s had no problem with the loudspeakers I chose to employ – PMC OB1s and the compact but rather unusual Neat Iota Xplorers [HFN Jul '18] – and in both cases made the most of the quality on offer from my Naim NDS network player to deliver a big, authoritative sound, packed with fine detail.

Rather as with some other British-built minimalist amps once thought to be great for rock but perhaps not the prime choice for, say, intimate jazz or delicate classical works, this Exposure trio shows clear all-round ability, and is at home thundering out music at full charge as they are when

ABOVE: Available in solid black or titanium casework for a lighter look, the 5010 preamplifier [top unit] and partnering 200W monoblocks are shown as a 'full stack' here

delighting with the sheer amount of clarity and information on offer.

None of that 'old Exposure' dynamics and drive has been diluted, yet the sound has more delicacy and space to it than I recall from early exploits with the company's products. That's much in evidence with the dense (and often mono) mixes on *The Essential Phil Spector* [Legacy 88725443752], with the plaintive vocal and harmonies of The Ronettes on 'Be My Baby' beautifully showcased against the big 'wall of sound' orchestration, while The Righteous Brothers sound suitably lush and magnificent on 'Ebb Tide'.

Similarly, the drive of Sad Café's 'Digital Daydream Blues' [from the two-pack release of the band's eponymous album and *Facades*; Demon edsd 2036] shows the way the Exposure 5010s can boogie, laying down a big weighty rhythm section with great definition for the drum kit while keeping the band fast and tight.

It's a punchy, appealing sound without ever showing any signs of the harshness or spit some claim to hear in amps known to favour rock music. Rather this is an entirely balanced presentation, as adept

EXPOSURE 5010 PREAMP/MONOS



ABOVE: The preamp [top] offers five line inputs (one for an MM/MC phono option), a slot for a digital/DAC option, a tape loop and three preamp outs (two on RCA and one balanced on XLR). The power amp [below] has dual 4mm sockets that support bi-wiring. The input is single-ended (RCA) or balanced (XLR)

at turning on the aggression when the music demands as it is at illuminating the finer details of an intricate recording.

EXPLODING INTO LIFE

This open, tightly-controlled and yet massively dynamic sound is heard to good effect with a fine recording such as Reference Recordings' Beethoven 'Eroica', by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Manfred Honeck [Fresh! FR-728; 192kHz/24-bit download]. Here the Symphony seemingly explodes into action with the hard-hitting opening chords, instantly setting the stage with a big, crisply-defined picture of the orchestra, the rhythms sprightly and captivating.

But the sound is just as persuasive in the second movement Funeral March, the sombre mood delicately shaded and yet still dramatic, and the instrumental timbres rendered with impressive texture and detail.

Striking, too, is the way the (relatively) compact 5010 monoblock power amps can both drive speakers properly and keep them under firm control, their ability to stop and start drive units with precision delivering

LEFT: Exposure's HS 3 system remote caters for the 5010 preamp's input selection, volume and mute



not just those often thrilling macro-dynamics but ensuring sensitive handling of the micro-dynamics that convey detail, imaging and timing.

Play Katia Labèque and Triple Sun's *Moondog* set of works by Louis Thomas Hardin, in an immaculate recording by guitarist/keyboard player David Chalmin [DG 678 3578; 88.2kHz/24-bit download], and the sheer presence of the musicians is one of the great pleasures of this Exposure amplification duo.

The sound is effortlessly three-dimensional and yet intimate and crisply focused, whether in the dream-like opening of 'Bird's Lament' or the snarling guitar break to which it builds, while Labèque's pianoforte always sounds perfectly weighted, and with just the right sense of both delicacy and attack. Clearly all of that simplicity – if that isn't simply a contradiction in terms – is being used to impressive effect. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

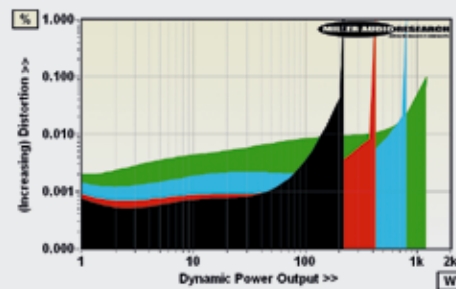
The new Exposure flagship amp system is deeply impressive. There's no sign of fat or bloat in the sound, and yet the 5010s manage to be highly revealing without ever becoming excessively bright or overbearing. The power amps are especially worthy of praise for their power and grip. Ignore the anonymous looks – buy with your ears rather than eyes – and you're likely to be extremely pleasantly surprised.

Sound Quality: 86%

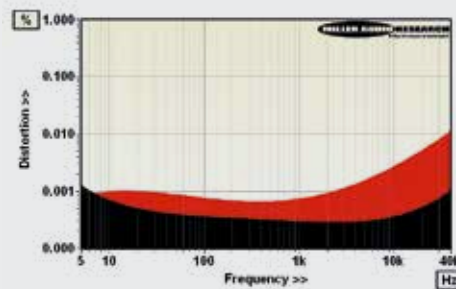


While the 5010 monoblocks *look* traditional, the circuit design, with cascode input and line gain stages, offers reduced noise and distortion over earlier Exposure amps. Specifically, the A-wtd S/N is a wide 98dB (re. 0dBV) – a great result bearing in mind the proximity of that huge 800VA toroid [see inside picture, p66] – and distortion very low at just 0.0003%/1W, 0.0006%/10W and 0.003%/100W through bass and midrange frequencies. Distortion increases to 0.003%/10kHz and 0.005%/20kHz but this is marginal [see red trace, Graph 2 below]. The matching 5010 preamp offers even lower noise and lower distortion, the former enabling a 95dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV) with THD as low as 0.0001% through the midrange and 0.00024% at 20kHz [black trace, Graph 2]. The preamp's response is slightly more tailored than that of the 5010 monoblocks, however, with a subsonic *boost* of +0.5Hz from 10Hz down to 1Hz (an issue with the DC servo, I'd suspect) coupled with a gentle HF roll-off of -0.12dB/10kHz, -0.45dB/20kHz and -7.1dB/100kHz. The power amp is flat to within ±0.1dB from 1Hz-12kHz into 8ohm, rolling off to -0.3dB/20kHz and -5.8dB/100kHz.

But what of the 5010's speaker-driving ability? In short, excellent, with a solid 2x213W/8ohm increasing to 2x415W/4ohm (this amp has a very tightly regulated power supply) and 220W, 428W, 804W and 1.22kW available into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic conditions [see Graph 1, below]. The maximum 35A current is limited by protection but this still represents an uncommonly high headroom for a '200W' amplifier, ensuring the 5010 monoblocks will drive any likely partnering loudspeaker with consummate ease. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 34.9A



ABOVE: THD vs. extended freq for 5010 preamp (1V out, black trace) vs. 5010 mono (10W/8ohm, red)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	213W / 415W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	220W / 428W / 804W / 1.22kW
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz, pre/power)	46ohm / 0.011–0.018ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–100kHz, pre/power)	+0.0 to -7.2dB / +0.0 to -5.8dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBV/0dBV)	190mV (pre) / 179mV (power)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV/0dBV)	94.6dB (pre) / 98.2dB (power)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 1V/10W)	0.0001–0.0003%/0.0006–0.005%
Power consump. (pre/idle/rated o/p)	10W / 45W/330W (mono)
Dimensions (WHD, Pre/Pow)/Weight	440x90(115)x300mm/6kg (14kg)