

Exposure 3510 Integrated Amplifier Review

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David Price listens to the latest in a long line of interesting integrated amps from this respected British brand...

Exposure

3510 Integrated Amplifier

£2,250



When I started reading hi-fi magazines over four decades ago, there was always one amplifier that its writers recommended. The NAD 3020 was so good in terms of sound quality relative to its price that it was a no-brainer. Many years later, I found myself as a poacher turned gamekeeper and needed something to celebrate as a great, 'one size fits all' integrated...

After reviewing umpteen mid-price amps and conducting several blind listening group tests, I finally settled on Exposure's 3010S2. It really was hard to argue with. A relatively minimalist design, it had few gimmicks but solid build and a lot of quality components under the hood. Moreover, its sound was excellent at the price, with a simple, musical and powerful feel that wasn't the most detailed or transparent, but just seemed to make everything it played fun. A bit like that classic NAD, actually!

So it was that the 3010S2 grew; it gained built-in DAC functionality and a few other tweaks, and a price hike. But still, when I came back to it, I couldn't find anything that really came close as an all-round package. I tried Arcams, Creeks, Marantz, Naims, Roksan, etc., and for me, the Exposure delivered the musical goods like no other at the price. After many years though, it has finally been replaced with the new 3510 (</uk/news/exposures-3510-integrated-amplifier-borrows-flagship-power-amp-tech>) that you see here. The worry for me is, has Exposure engineered out the magic?

UP CLOSE

Exposure tells me that this new **Tony Brady** design took roughly a year to do, and features trickle-down technology from Exposure's top-of-range 5010 series. It puts out a claimed 110W RMS per side into 8 ohms – the same as its predecessor – and 200W into 4 ohms. Apparently, its 2 ohm power output is limited by the overcurrent protection circuit to around 200W, too. The preamp section is a version of that used in the 3010S2-D, modified in order to drive headphones. The power amp is new and said to have been reworked for better linearity and lower distortion, especially at high output.



Designed and built in the UK, it sports six RCA line inputs, with the option to substitute one or two of these to fit an MC or MM phono module (both £300 each), or a plug-in DAC (£410). Exposure says that ideally, they should be fitted by a dealer, but when this is not possible, a “competent customer” should be able to do it. Styling is very similar, although the input selection arrangement has changed, so the input selected is now shown by one of a row of LEDs mounted centrally in the fascia. For me, this is a retrograde step and not as clean looking as the 3010S2.

The new amp retains its predecessor's fine connectivity. The rear panel sports doubled-up speaker binding posts (for bi-wiring, if you are that way inclined), a preamplifier output (for bi-amping, or to use with a separate power amplifier – handy for many) and a new central fascia-mounted headphone socket. The AV input can be set to fixed or variable gain, so you can use it as a standard stereo in or a fixed gain home cinema input.

Inside, we get to the heart of the 3510's appeal – and indeed that of its predecessor – a beefy Class AB solid-state power amp section using fast bipolar power transistors in the output stage, as per Exposure tradition. Again, many rivals use MOSFET power modules, an approach that tends to be less popular with obsessive audiophiles. The power supply has extra smoothing and uses a chunky 400VA toroidal transformer. The preamp uses all discrete transistors in the gain stage, with a power supply designed to minimise supply rail noise. Input switching has been changed to lower crosstalk, and signal paths and power supply paths have been shortened.



The nicely turned out all-aluminium casework – available in black or titanium – is superior to that of many rivals, which use pressed steel rear sections at this price. It is complemented by the chunky extruded aluminium fascia, which Exposure says minimises noise and controls magnetic fields.

THE LISTENING

Back in the nineteen-eighties, Exposure built a reputation for itself as a purveyor of high-end solid-state pre and power amps that were just a little smoother and more beguiling than those of its then arch-rival, Naim. The sound has always been powerful and musically enjoyable, but just a little softer around the edges than some others. The 3510 is absolutely no different in this respect and shares a strong family 'voice' to its 3010S2-D predecessor.



It has a gutsy sound alright, and has a big, strong bouncy bass. The midband is smooth, creamy even, and has lots of detail without ramming it down your throat. Treble is just a little soft and diffuse in absolute terms, but still as sweet as any Class AB solid-state design can be at this level, and devoid of harshness or grain. Imaging is decently wide, and the soundstage drops back a fair bit too. It's a teensy bit crisper and more detailed than the 3010S2-D, I'd say; there's a slightly stiffer backbone to the sound compared to the amp it replaces. It's a worthwhile improvement over this then, but I'm not sure that I'd sell my old one and spend out on a new one given the relatively subtle nature of the change.

All the same, compared to its price rivals, most of which I have heard or reviewed over the years, I'd say the new 3510 is a very strong proposition. It does precisely what its predecessor did, which is to round up all the good bits of its rivals and package them up in one single product, whilst having no obvious downsides at its price. In other words, it's a great all-rounder – an integrated amplifier jack of all trades, and master of some.



It excels in power delivery. I reviewed the 3510 back-to-back with Rotel's monstrous (and far more expensive) Michi X5 (</uk/reviews/rotel-michi-x5-integrated-amplifier-review>). The Exposure didn't have the latter's epic levels of power and clarity, yet it still turned in a really engaging and chunky sound – one that was tonally warmer and sweeter, albeit more diffuse. For example, *Dance on a Volcano* by **Genesis** was loads of fun, when driven by my Chord Hugo TT2 DAC and powering my reference Yamaha NS-1000M speakers. The Exposure really made use of its large reserves of power, thumping out the track at high levels with relative ease. There was a good deal of detail, but I was most taken by the bassline, which was never meek and mild, and if anything was just a little fuller than the aforementioned Rotel. This was certainly the case in the upper bass, giving this amp a weightier sound than expected.

Of course, the 3510 can't deliver breathtaking dynamics at high volume levels – Exposure can sell you its more expensive pre/power amps for that – but it still does very well compared to rivals. In a way, it reminds me of Roksan's K3, but with more grunt. It's got an 'up and at 'em' sort of approach, like a bulldog on a lead that wants to pull its owner's hand off to get to another dog coming its way. Rather than sitting back and playing it cool, it loves life and wants a piece of it. The complex strains of early **Genesis** showed this brilliantly, but you could tell this regardless of musical genre. For example, the **Human League's** *The Things That Dreams Are Made Of* came over in a barnstorming way, with oodles of energy and drive. This was despite its smooth tonality, which never grated or seared – a fascinating point because many 'lively' sounding amps achieve this simply by being tonally forward. Not this!



That warm, fulsome upper bass is complemented by a pretty neutral midband, one which has a good sprinkling of detail and a fairly silky treble that seems to me to be just a little too smooth sounding with some programme material. I found that hooking it up to a great pair of open sounding standmounters – the Neat Majistra (</uk/reviews/neat-acoustics-majistra-standmount-speaker->

review) in this case – really suited the Exposure. Its ribbon tweeters seemed to unlock the 3510's treble detail, and project its smooth midband better. It was a great combination, made better by the amp's great current-driving ability, which this particular speaker really appreciated. The jazzy soul strains of **Randy Crawford's** *You Might Need Somebody* were joyous; crisp, detailed and intricate; this integrated really did justice to the rich grain of this singer's distinctive tremulous voice.

Soundstaging is decent enough, but not this amplifier's finest trait. It's just a little closed-in compared to some price rivals – and I do mean just a little. For example, an old recording of **Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony** (**Karajan, Berlin Phil**) didn't have the vast expanse that some pricier designs are able to communicate. The music was still very enjoyable, though, the Exposure showing off its ability to accurately capture the natural rhythm of the piece and the human spirit behind it. It's an animated and engaging sounding amplifier for sure, just not the world's most accurate. That's something you can excuse it for at this price, yet no one can learn to live with an amplifier that's not fun.

THE VERDICT



Exposure's new 3510 sounds pretty similar to its excellent, class-leading predecessor – meaning it can do little wrong. It's a useful improvement and makes a genuinely capable amplifier available to cost-conscious mid-market buyers. It has few, if any, real weaknesses – plus a natural love of music and enough power and detail to enjoy it. I would strongly suggest you audition it if you're in the market because it does so much so well at the price.

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David started his career in 1993 writing for Hi-Fi World and went on to edit the magazine for nearly a decade. He was then made Editor of Hi-Fi Choice and continued to freelance for it and Hi-Fi News until becoming StereoNET's Editor-in-Chief.