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Subject: Re: Best Amps for 3Pi

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 29 Dec 2018 00:03:47 GMT

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I won't recommend brands, but I will provide some (hopefully useful) feedback.

I've run all models on several amps including 2-10 watt SET, 10-30 watt ultra-linear tube amps, solid state chip amps from 25-100 watts and several-thousand watt class AB discrete transistors. I've also run a variety of digital amps from 25 watts (commercial) to several thousand watts (prosound).

All of them work well provided they are good-quality amps and they aren't pushed past their limits. When pushed past their limits, some amps are more graceful than others. Clipping is nasty on most solid state amps, less a problem on tube amps and especially SET amps.

I personally like amps with enough power. Single-ended amps are sweet, but I think people often push them past their limits. They don't get grungy when they start clipping, so people tend to get used to their sound. But they do start sounding a little bit strained or "heavy" sounding as they bump up against the rails and shave off the top of the waveform. So because of this, I tend to suggest a minimum of ten watts. I've run two watt SET amps, and they sound good and get plenty loud. But I'd rather have at least ten watts.

Once you move into the Class AB (and ultra-linear) tube amps, you have a lot of choices that offer enough power. In this world, I find the best amps sound a lot like SET amps and I've heard some really good Class AB and ultra-linear tube amps. Probably most of the high-end tube amps are in this category. But I find the lesser amps sound a little bit distorted all the time, and some of them make odd noises like squeaks and whistles. I think this is probably specific to certain brands and mismatched tubes though.

In the solid-state world, I find better amps sound very natural as long as they are not pushed into clipping. Once any solid-state amp starts to clip, it sounds harsh and "jagged." But lesser amps sound slightly distorted all the time.

I think I have a preconceived notion against digital amps because I tend to avoid them, except for light duty or things that I consider "secondary." I never use them for mains, but sometimes use them for surrounds and sometimes for subs. But they sound pretty good, so I think my bias is probably unfounded.

Above all, live with the amplifier for a while. One of the most important things is that the amplifier remains a constant for you for years and years. It should almost be "forgettable" in that it just amplifies the signal and other than that draws no attention to itself. It should be trouble-free and this isn't something you'll know until some time has passed.

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