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Subject: Best Amps for 3Pi

Posted by [Les Winter](#) on Fri, 28 Dec 2018 20:50:06 GMT

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I have a pair of 3Pi's and am well pleased with them. I run a pair of flanking subs. So far I have run the 3's with a single ended all triode/no feed back amp (Tubelab SSE) and with an ultralinear el84 amp (stock Dynaco st35). The ultralinear amp is good for around 15 watts. The single ended is good for around 3.

I listen to opera and classical and not at ear shattering levels.

The single ended was a little too tubey for my tastes. The st35 is pretty good, but I'd like to know if more power would be better in this case.

Does anyone have experience with more powerful tube amps? I could build a KT88 amp that does 30 watts or so triode and 60 in ultra linear. It would be a lot of work. So before I start, anybody care to comment?

thanks.

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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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Subject: Re: Best Amps for 3Pi  
Posted by [Barryso](#) on Sat, 29 Dec 2018 00:56:21 GMT  
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Just so you know where this is coming from there have been tube amps in my system for years. Push pull 6L34's, single ended 2A3's and some lesser well known tubes, too.

Wayne won't mention brands but I will. :)

On the recommendation of one of the Lone Star Audio Fest folks I picked up an Amp Camp Amp kit from diyaudiostore. This is the little class A solid state amp Nelson Pass designed to be put together quickly by those who are new to building electronics. A single amp running in stereo puts out about 8 watts per side.

I've never spent any time with solid state class A amps so this is a new adventure. It's not a tube amp but it's got some 2nd harmonic thing happening that's similar to a tube amp. It nicely textured and a bit laid back sounding - but it's not tubey or sweet sounding the way some tube amps can be. It's an interesting flavor of amp.

If you could find somebody in your area and borrow something similar it'd be worth the effort. It may not be "the answer" but class A solid state is a very interesting flavor of amp and it's worth hearing if you aren't interested in tubey but don't want anything that sounds overly solid state.

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Subject: Re: Best Amps for 3Pi  
Posted by [Les Winter](#) on Sat, 29 Dec 2018 13:47:22 GMT  
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Thank you gents. Very informative and helpful.

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Subject: Re: Best Amps for 3Pi

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Sun, 30 Dec 2018 03:56:49 GMT

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Just something else possible in the tube category your familiar with. But not a typical tube sound. Transcendent Sound OTL amp kit's. I've used a 40 watt monoblock design, (no longer available) going on 20 years now. No output transformer in the speaker path. So, great bass and really nice holographic realism. Which means to me, being able to sample musical parts individually or as a whole. For your musical genre and speaker sensitivity, the 15 watt Son of Beast would do a right fine job for your music. <https://www.transcendentsound.com/products-.html>

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Subject: Re: Best Amps for 3Pi

Posted by [johnnycamp5](#) on Tue, 01 Jan 2019 16:03:05 GMT

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I will also mention brands lol.

I have a couple of the ACA kits Barryso is talking about. I intend to try them as mono-blocks (15W each), but I haven't gotten around to building them yet..

I have built the Oddwatt Audio, S2 kt88 mono blocks, and they have sounded superb with my 4pi's over the long haul (about a year) without a single hiccup...

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