



## Tech 21 Acoustic Fly Rig

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

**SINCE BEING INTRODUCED** commercially in 1989 by Tech 21 founder B. Andrew Barta, SansAmp has become a brand associated with quality direct boxes like Band-Aid has for adhesive bandages. Tech 21 has won awards from *GP* for its electric Fly Rigs—all-in-one pedal strips consisting of a SansAmp plus overdrive and effects sections—and now there's a Fly Rig aimed at the acoustic performer on the go. In addition to an all-analog SansAmp that automatically converts guitar signals to low impedance, ensuring a lively direct tone even from magnetic pickups, the Acoustic Fly Rig (\$299 street) features Comp and EFX sections with compression, delay or chorus, reverb, and a tuner loaded in an astonishingly compact package.

I was expecting something the size of, say, a triple BOSS pedal, but the copper colored AFR is actually much smaller, shorter, and lighter. Just longer than a ruler and weighing less than two pounds, the Acoustic Fly Rig is comparable to a typical household power strip, and easily stashable in a backpack, gig bag, or guitar case. The tiny yet firm-feeling controls light up when each section is engaged: blue for effects, red for EQ, yellow for compression, and a purple Volume. Groovy!

I auditioned the Acoustic Fly Rig using a few different guitars through a couple of different amps, and it became clear that the AFR is designed to help deliver your tone—not force a particular color upon you. Using the balanced XLR output delivers a bold signal to a mixer or a powered P.A. speaker, and the unbalanced 1/4" is ideal for feeding

the front end of an acoustic amplifier. A Taylor 514ce with its onboard Fishman Prefix preamp controls set to my usual preferences sounded excellent with all the SansAmp controls set straight up at noon—Low Pass Filter, High, Mid, Mid Shift, and Low. With the Boost knob set a tad below noon, it provided a nice volume bump without increasing the noise floor too much.

I'm not a heavy compression user, but when I experienced the warm, clear platform provided by the Acoustic Fly's FET-based analog compressor with the Level and Comp knobs set judiciously at 9 o'clock, I became hooked on how it helped—especially on fingerstyle passages. Switching to either one of a pair of Deluxe 800 Series Taylors with the Expression System 2 controls centered, feedback ensued, because those love-lies really pump out the mids. A push of the Phase Flip button tamed the moan, and a push of the Notch button centered at 150Hz wiped it away. The SansAmp's active EQ facilitates awesome control. I appreciated being able to add quality girth without being too boomy, as well as sparkling highs that I could temper precisely with the sweepable Low Pass Filter.

The Acoustic Fly Rig features a simple interface to control exceptional signal processing of crucial effects. A single knob controls reverb level, and a button underneath selects small or large 'verb. Another button selects either chorus or a tape-voiced delay, and a single knob controls that level, as well. The chorus is tailored for acoustic as a pitch shift effect, designed to eliminate the need for speed and depth

controls. In delay mode, a pair of knobs control Repeats and Time. The latter is automatically overridden when you hit the tap tempo button, which, to me, is absolutely essential. Holding down the same button mutes the signal and engages the chromatic tuner. I encountered poor response and tracking on middle strings using the onboard pickups from either Taylor, but the tuner worked fine with a magnetic Fishman Blackstack pickup in the soundhole, and it tracked respectably when I plugged in a Fender Paramount Travel PM-TE, which has a Fishman PM preamp with an under-saddle piezo pickup.

Tech 21 clearly considered what's truly needed on an acoustic gig, and put exactly that into the Acoustic Fly Rig. Plug it into a P.A., and you're good to go. Players using magnetic soundhole pickups should be especially interested. It's also a kickass preamp and pedal consolidator. I've got a killer acoustic amp, as well as a gang of awesome pedals on an expandable Holey-board Dragonfly 2.0. But that gets big and heavy, and I don't need all those pedals for a strictly acoustic show. The Acoustic Fly Rig is now integral to my acoustic gig rig—whether I'm actually flying anywhere or not—and considering its potential in the home studio or as a headphone amp, the AFR gets an Editors' Pick Award.

**KUDOS** Everything an acoustic performer needs to hit the club in a full-sounding, super-portable package.

**CONCERNS** Some issues with the tuner.

**CONTACT** tech21nyc.com