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Tech 21 SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2

Taking the direct approach to great bass tones

by Phil O'Keefe



Tech 21's SansAmp line has been hugely popular with musicians. These handy boxes are often considered as direct recording tools and they're very good for that, but there is far more to them than that alone. One of the most popular boxes in the SansAmp line has been the Bass Driver DI. Now Tech 21 has updated this essential bass accessory in version 2 form. Let's have a look at what makes it so cool, what's new in the latest version, and some of the things you can do with it.



What You Need To Know

- The SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 is packed in a all-metal case that measures 4.75" W x 3.75" D x 2.0" H and weighs 14 ounces. The Bass Driver DI v2 has the classic SansAmp color scheme of golden yellow lettering on a black powder-coated background, making everything easy to read, even in low light conditions.
- The basic tone and circuit of the pedal remains the same as its predecessor, but the v2 version has a few added features to make it even more flexible.
- The 1/4" Input jack is mounted on the right side of the pedal. It has a nice high 1megOhm input impedance, and also turns on the battery whenever it's plugged in, so always unplug it when you're not using it to preserve your battery life.



- Right next to the Input is a hardwired parallel output jack that passes your input signal out un-effected; similar to the thru jack you'll find on many ordinary direct boxes, it allows you to connect to an amp and use the Bass Driver DI v2 for a direct feed simultaneously.
- There are a total of seven knobs at five pushbutton switches on the Bass Driver DI v2.
- Level sets the overall output level of the pedal and this applies to both the XLR and main 1/4" output.
- Drive sets the amount of gain and the level of overdrive.
- Presence adjusts the amount of upper harmonic content, and higher settings can give overdriven tones more edge and attack. For smoother overdrive and clean tones, Tech 21 advises lowering this knob to taste.
- There are three EQ controls (Treble, Mid and Bass), and all three are active and can cut or boost by up to 12dB. Treble is centered at 3.2kHz, while the midrange center frequency can be switched between 500Hz and 1kHz with a pushbutton switch. Likewise, the center frequency for the Bass EQ can also be user adjusted with a switch, with 80Hz and 40Hz options offered.
- Other pushbutton switches provide a -20dB setting for the XLR output, a +10dB option for the main 1/4" Out, and a ground lift / phantom power connect switch for the XLR.
- The SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 also includes a Blend control. This lets you blend in a little (or a lot) of the clean, unaffected signal to go along with the SansAmp tube amp emulation. The Treble, Mid and Bass tone controls, as well as the Level control remain active even when the SansAmp amp simulation is essentially turned off by running the Blend at its lowest setting.

- Bypass switching is handled by a no-click footswitch and the Bass Driver DI v2 features Tech 21's excellent buffered bypass. A red LED illuminates whenever the pedal is active.
- The SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 can be powered with a user-supplied 9V alkaline battery (the battery compartment can be accessed through a tool-free hatch mounted in the bottom of the pedal), through phantom power over the XLR cable, or with an optional Tech 21 Model DC2 9V DC power supply.
- The 9V DC power supply port is mounted on the left side of the pedal near the output jacks. It uses the industry-standard 2.1mm center-negative format. The SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 draws about 100mA of power at 9V DC.
- There are two output jacks on the SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 - a 1/4" and an XLR. Both output jacks work simultaneously, and both switch between the SansAmp tube amp simulation and the unprocessed signal, depending on the status of the footswitch. This allows you to use the pedal with amp simulation, or as a regular active DI box.



- This opens up lots of possibilities and things this versatile pedal can be used for. Some examples include using it as a stand-alone preamp for a power amp and speaker cab, active direct box / direct recording tool, tone-shaper pedal, running it direct to the PA for live use, and using it as a bass overdrive pedal in front of your bass amp are just some of the potential applications.
- The included manual (which is also available online as a PDF file) includes lots of sample settings to get you started as well as blank layout sheets for you to write down your own favorite settings.
- The Bass Driver DI v2 comes with a cool "cookie tin" metal storage box.

Limitations

- There is no separate switch to deactivate the onboard speaker simulation; it's always part of the SansAmp tube amp emulation. However, since bass rigs tend to be full-range anyway, this poses no significant issues in real-world use, even when running the pedal into a bass amplifier.
- The labeling and placement of the five pushbutton switches can be a bit confusing at first but you'll quickly figure them out, and chances are you will set and forget most of them anyway.
- You can either ground lift the XLR connector, or phantom power the pedal. You can not do both simultaneously due to the way phantom powering works.

Conclusions

This is a very useful and versatile box. Not only is it great for its intended purpose as a tonal shaper and as a bass overdrive, but it also works well as a Bass DI box too. In addition to its excellent amp simulation capabilities, it's also a very quiet pedal with loads of cool sounds onboard. The added features compared to the first version of the Bass Driver DI add further to what was already a solid pedal, giving the pedal more control and added reach in the bass region and making it better suited to the needs of modern five and six string bass players. Likewise the added Mid control allows for even more flexibility in dialing up your sound.

The SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 is not just for bass players - acoustic guitarists, Chapman Stick players, as well as baritone and 7/8 string guitarists will also find uses for this pedal too. Studio owners should consider this a must-have accessory as well, since it makes getting consistently solid recorded bass tones a snap, and does it without the bleed or hassles of a miked amp. Having a hard time waxing great bass tones? Then you *need* this box!

Owners of the original Bass Driver DI will have a tougher choice on their hands. While the basic functions and tone remain the same, the added Mid EQ, along with the Bass shift EQ switch give it added capabilities that the previous version lacked. Whether they are important enough to justify upgrading will come down to the needs of the individual user, but if you don't have one of these pedals already (either version), you really do owe it to yourself to give one a try. It really is a bass essential that just about any bass player will find extremely useful. -HC-

Resources

Tech 21 SansAmp Bass Driver v2 (\$275.00 MSRP, \$209.00 "street")

Tech 21's SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 [product web page](#)

Tech 21 Bass Driver DI v2 [manual](#) (PDF file)

You can purchase the Tech 21 SansAmp Bass Driver DI v2 from:

[Sweetwater](#)

[Musician's Friend](#)

[B&H Photo](#)

[Guitar Center](#)



Phil O'Keefe is a multi-instrumentalist, recording engineer / producer and the Senior Editor of Harmony Central. He has engineered, produced and performed on countless recording sessions in a diverse range of styles, with artists such as Alien Ant Farm, Jules Day, Voodoo Glow Skulls, John McGill, Michael Knott and Alexa's Wish. He is a former featured monthly columnist for EQ magazine, and his articles and product reviews have also appeared in Keyboard, Electronic Musician and Guitar Player magazines.