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TECH 21 SANSAMP BASS DRIVER DI VERSION 2

It's hard to overstate the impact Tech 21's SansAmp Bass Driver DI has had since its release in 1994. Few all-in-one DI packages have simultaneously delivered its caliber of tones and ruggedness while remaining so simple to operate. And it's remained pretty much the same—until Tech 21's recent unveiling of a second-generation version of the ubiquitous DI device. Version 2 contains the identical all-analog circuitry of its predecessor, but raises the ante by adding a smattering of updates geared towards the modern bassist.

Driven to the Edge

The build quality of the new Bass Driver DI improves on the solid reputation of the original by including enclosed jacks secured by metal nuts and opting for high-quality latching push buttons in place of the original's slider switches. The pedal can be connected in a variety of ways, using the parallel output for a dedicated dry output and the XLR and main 1/4" output for sending the effected signal. It employs buffered bypassing and is powered by either a 9V battery or power supply, as well as being phantom-power operable.

The pedal has controls for volume, wet/dry signal blend, presence, and drive. It also features an expanded 3-band active EQ (+/-12 dB) with treble, midrange, and bass controls. There is no dedicated midrange dial on the original. There's also a pair of new control buttons for shifting the center frequencies of the mids between 500 Hz and 1 kHz, and the center frequencies of the bass between 80 Hz and 40 Hz.

Along with my P bass and the Gallien-Krueger 800RB, it was easy work getting a fantastic tone with plenty of thick, low midrange by setting the Bass Driver's drive at 9 o'clock, everything else at noon, and then slowly increasing the presence to taste. When I switched to a different Precision tuned to C standard, a quick press of the bass-shift button to 40 Hz caused the walls to shake, yet still impressed me with how little it affected the tonality of the low end.



As its name implies, the Bass Driver excels at dishing out grinding overdrive. With my down-tuned P and the drive set anywhere between 2 and 5 o'clock, the tone was heavy and guttural with an absolutely punishing midrange. Lesser drive settings beginning at 11 o'clock softened the low end and gradually accentuated the attack as I dialed down the gain farther. Overall, I'd describe the resulting sound as an aggressive mid-focused grit that grows angrier as more gain is applied, but without the harsh, ear-fatiguing frequencies that often result from such heavy saturation.

The remaining push buttons let you attenuate the XLR output by -20 dB, boost the main 1/4" out by +10 dB, and engage either ground lifting or phantom power through the XLR jack—handy features for direct recording, especially if the input trimmers on your interface are sensitive. Meanwhile, the Bass Driver's speaker simulation is still fantastic. My only gripe is that you can't bypass the circuit and use the pedal as simply a preamp. This wouldn't have been an issue years ago, but these days many players prefer to record with DAWs and their own cabinet impulse responses. As a workaround, Tech 21 states that the blend knob can be turned all the way down and the EQ, level, and boost will still function.

The Verdict

The second incarnation of Tech 21's SansAmp Bass Driver DI hits high

marks, which is a natural conclusion given that it retains the meat and potatoes of the original yet adds some more to the pie with the slight but welcome changes it's undergone. The "it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach works in its favor since it's still easy to get a killer tone almost immediately, and even better ones after spending more time with it. If you're a current Bass Driver devotee and are mulling over whether this version is worth the upgrade, I guess you need to ask yourself how much you're dying for a dedicated midrange control and the added frequency shift functions. If you're a bassist who's never explored the possibilities of a Bass Driver DI, you owe it to yourself to check out what many bassists have before you.

RATINGS

\$209 street
tech21nyc.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Delivers classic Bass Driver tone. Frequency shift switches and midrange dial help tailor the sound even further.

CONS A switch to completely bypass cabinet emulation would be nice.