



REVIEW

BY HAR



“Black-Face” and “Silver-Face” Fenders below 12 o’clock, warmer “Blonde” amps around 12 o’clock itself, and crunchier “Tweed” tones going past that. It also has a Mid knob, sorely lacking from the GT2. Would the Blonde deliver the shimmering clean tones I’d been hankering for?

To test, I first plugged my Strat directly into the Blonde, and ran its output to my computer (through my rack, with no intermediate processing). I set all the knobs to an arbitrary 12 o’clock position, clicked on the pedal, switched to my neck pickup (Seymour Duncan Vintage Rails) and played an open D chord.

It was honestly a jaw-drop moment—I was presented with *exactly* the clean amp tone I had imagined: shimmering bell-like highs, a warm “round” body with just a hint of grit. *Loud*, too: plenty of gain on tap... and dead quiet between notes to boot. Backing off the guitar’s volume knob cleaned things up even further. Perfect.

Dimming the Character knob while tweaking the Drive took me off in the other direction: a crunchy yet sweet, thick sustaining tone that just *forced* me to play the opening chords to Ted Nugent’s “Cat Scratch Fever”. Gonzo indeed!

However, SansAmps tend to *respond* like a real amp, not just sound like one, so I wanted to see how it sounded running other pedals into it while running totally clean. I dialed everything back, plugged in a Catalinbread Dirty Little Secret pedal which itself does an excellent job of recreating Marshall-style tones, and bashed out Lifeson-esque power-chords while tweaking

Tech21 Blonde

Amp simulation in places where you can't put an amp

Tech21’s Character Series of pedals are modeled (in an analog sense, not digital) to emulate the sound and feel of a number of classic amps, craftily-renamed: “Leeds” to designate Hiwatt amps, “British” to designate Marshall amps, and so on. Recently released are the Version 2 series of some of these pedals, which now feature a switch to defeat the famous SansAmp speaker emulation in case you want to run the pedal into a real amp with a real speaker.

The Tech21 Blonde model—based on Fender amps—specifically grabbed my attention, as I’d hoped it would address the one thing I personally found lacking in my own older SansAmp GT2: a clean, clear ringing amp tone that could make my Strat sing. The GT2 is wonderful for big distorted tones, but never seemed to “clean up” the way I’d hoped, even at its “Tweed” setting.

As with all of the other pedals in the series, the Blonde features a Character knob designed to let you dial in various characteristics of that particular amp—in this case, meaning to emulate crystal clear

the drive on both pedals. Did it sound just like a Marshall running into a Fender? Maybe not, but it *did* give me a wonderful hybrid-type tone—clear ringing highs with huge powerful crunch... all while going DI to my computer.

If you’re looking for the perfect means to get a warm, clean, ringing, and *responsive* guitar-amp tone while recording DI to your mixer/computer, one that’s also great for stacking with other effects, I highly recommend putting the SansAmp Blonde at the top of your list to try out first. ☺

Price: \$169 street

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