



## TECH 21 FLY RIG 5

(PLEXI, CALI, BRIT,  
AND RK5 - RICHIE  
KOTZEN)

## DISTORTION AND EFFECT PEDALS

Review By **Dave Celentano**

STREET PRICE:

**\$249 (PLEXI, BRIT, OR CALI)**

**\$269 (RK5 RICHIE KOTZEN)**

**L**ook up in the sky. It's a bird. It's a plane. No, it's a Fly Rig 5 from Tech 21! A quartet of rugged, compact distortion and effects pedals that are ready for every gig you have, and a breeze to travel with. Just plug any one of the models into an amp, studio mixing board, or PA and you're ready to go – complete with amazingly killer overdriven tones that will leave fellow musicians envious. All four models, "Plexi," "Cali," "Brit," and "RK5 - Richie Kotzen," boast iconic distortion tones specific to each pedal.

Fly Rig 5 models replace those cumbersome pedalboards and spaghetti mess of cables and patch cords with one small, multi-purpose "mini-pedalboard" that redefines the meaning of rig. No more lugging around a big amp or relying on questionable backlines. Weighing in at just over a pound and slightly under one foot in length, these pedals pack one hell of a wallop. Proof that size doesn't matter! Small enough to fit in your guitar case or gig bag, every model in the Fly Rig



5 series will have you second guessing your current setup in favor of one of these space efficient and road-worthy pedals. Imagine showing up to the gig with your guitar, then pulling out a Fly Rig 5 unit and plugging straight into the PA. How simple is that?

## FEATURES

**Similarities:** all four models include essential effects like delay and reverb, and a 3-band EQ, but the heart of the pedals is the highly praised all-analog SansAmp tube emulator and speaker simulator that delivers warm and clean amp tones while providing classic overdrive minus aural artifacts associated with digital technology. Each pedal has three territories from left to right: "DLA" (delay), "SansAmp" (EQ, reverb, and drive), and one of four face-melting distortions "Plexi," "Cali," "Brit," and "OMG" (Richie Kotzen), all of which can be turned on or off at the player's discretion via footswitches on the front of the pedal. Engage one, two, or all three sections for a variety of clean and

distorted tones. Employing the Boost switch (Hot on the Plexi model) kicks the volume up 21dB when you need that little push over the edge for solos or increased dynamics, and acts independently to boost any of the other active sections.

The control knobs are very responsive so go easy. A slight nudge makes a big difference. And speaking of this, the knobs on Fly Rig 5 models are small and might challenge larger fingers except RK5, which has bigger digit-friendly knobs. To resolve this, Tech 21 includes four slip-on rubber Knob Grippers on the Level controls, which can easily be moved to another position. And if four isn't enough, additional 10-packs are available for sale at the Tech 21 web site (see below). Control knobs are backlit with different colors for easy viewing and adjustments on dark stages: blue - DLA section, orange - SansAmp, and yellow - Brit, Plexi, Cali, or OMG. Plus, the colors let you know whether a section of the pedal is on or off. In addition to providing subtle ambience,



the DLA section can be massaged to produce Police and U2-like delay textures as well, and increasing the Drift knob creates a bonus 'hidden chorus' effect. DLA also includes a tap tempo foot switch that overrides the manual Time knob for setting the delay tempo.

I test drove all four models with a Les Paul, Strat, and a lesser unnamed with pleasing results. Even a guitar with weak pickups or dull tone will shape up with a little adjustment from the SansAmp EQ. Although the SansAmp section can produce great classic overdrive, the third sector (on the right side of each pedal) is where you'll find face-melting distortions and the pedals' namesake.

Differences: "Brit Fly Rig 5" – impressive sounding with warm, realistic British amp tones akin to a Vox AC30. Especially great for early Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Eric Clapton Bluesbreakers era, and perfect for gritty blues and 60s to early 70s classic rock.

"Plexi Fly Rig 5" – the pedal to have for 70s and early 80s classic rock. Mirrored after Marshall's 'Plexi', it's considered by many to be the holy grail of amp tones from the era. Everything from slight break up to punchy overdrive, it'll have you busting out your Van Halen, AC/DC, and Stevie Ray Vaughan licks, 'cause this pedal can do it all!

"Cali Fly Rig 5" – Metallica lovers, this pedal is for you. Emulating a Mesa Boogie Rectifier, 'Cali' produces both clean and distorted west coast metal-inspired tones. Use a clean setting crank, the 'Drift' control in the DLA section for a spot-on replication of Metallica's 'Sanitarium'. But there's more here than just head-banging. It can also whip up a mean Santana and Foo Fighters tone.



**FLY RIG<sup>5</sup>**

"RK5 Fly Rig (Richie Kotzen) – the distortion stage on RK5 is called "OMG" and as the name implies, Kotzen's tone will have you screaming "Oh My God!" in delight for the insane amounts of overdrive and sustain lasting for days.

Mr. Kotzen and Tech 21 spent time developing this channel to interact with the guitar volume knob so it cleans up nicely when turned down.

All Fly Rig 5 pedals come with a Tech 21 power supply, so no need to worry about batteries inconveniently dying out. And on the low side, there is a 5th version: the Bass Fly Rig. ■



### VERDICT

Whether practicing at home, recording your next hit song in the studio, or parading on the big stage, these compact pedals are your answer to portability and versatility without the headache of lugging around an amp and effects. Plus, you'll get a professional tone that easily rivals any amp, or at least provides a great backup just in case your main rig unexpectedly dies. All Fly Rig 5 models will knock your socks off. But don't take my word for it. Check them out at your local music store or online at:

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