



SOUNDROOM

Tech 21 VT Bass DI

BY ED FRIEDLAND

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1989, TECH 21 HAS cultivated a very healthy selection of bass-specific products. Its celebrated SansAmp Bass Driver DI has long been a gig bag staple for touring and recording players, but its newest addition, the VT Bass DI, is poised to become the next must-have bass multi-tool.

Built around Tech 21's proprietary SansAmp technology, the VT DI is the latest offering in the VT series, which includes the VT Bass, VT Bass Deluxe, and the new VT Bass Rack. If the graphics and name aren't enough of a hint: the VT Bass series is intended to emulate the tonal and performance characteristics of classic Ampeg rigs—namely, the SVT and B-15—along with a wide range of other tones. Is it possible to make a pedal sound exactly like a searing, 300-watt, tube-fired, lead-sled pushing an 8x10 fridge/cab? No, but you can get damn close. The original VT pedal has seen refinements over the years, but at the core is a well-designed set of tools that behave very much like the amps they are modeled after. However, this is not digital modeling—the VT DI is completely analog, and many feel this gives the effect warmth and realism, and removes the risk of digital latency.

The VT DI takes the VT concept to the logical next level with the addition of the DI, and some tweaking to the circuit has been done to capitalize on this feature. The XLR output's -20dB pad makes it easier to match varying level requirements such as driving a power amp, or going direct to a mixing console, and the ground lift and phantom power capabilities are useful connectivity tools. The ¼" out has a +10dB boost which allows you to bypass your amp's preamp and drive the power amp via the effect return, or drive a separate power amp. There is a parallel out that sends an un-effected, balanced signal to your amp or another source. The BITE switch is a new feature that helps the pedal blend in different applications. When engaged, BITE adds a presence boost and a subsonic filter. The presence is useful when going into a power amp with no additional EQ, and adds definition to more driven tones, but if used in front

of your preamp, care must be taken with the amp EQ to avoid harshness. Turning off the BITE also disengages the subsonic filter, which makes the low end flab out a bit—a trait that can come in handy at times, but I vote for separating the two functions for maximum flexibility.

The Speaker simulation does a good job mimicking the high frequency rolloff of a tweeter-less multi-10" speaker cab, and adds realism to the DI output. Disengaging the SPEAKER SIM brightens the tone considerably, which might be helpful if you're running through a tweeter-less cab of your own. The LEVEL control changes the output of both the ¼" and XLR outputs, and by rolling the Blend knob fully counter-clockwise, the VT DI functions great as a "straight" preamp (sans the SansAmp effect) with its powerful 3-band EQ. But the BLEND control (a feature wisely ported over from the Bass Driver DI) gives this pedal an edge for live work by allowing you to mix the SansAmp effect with the straight (post-EQ) sound of your bass. The BLEND interacts with the other controls, so it's worth experimenting with different ratios—with highly saturated settings, the SansAmp circuit's inherent compression can obscure your attack if run at full BLEND.

The CHARACTER knob is essentially a midrange control that sweeps through Ampeg-land, while also effecting the attack and drive response. At fully counter-clockwise, the mid scoop is very SVT-like, and rotating clockwise adds more midrange content. Set at 12 o'clock, the pedal is said to emulate the B-15 flitop—the tone does transform at that point in the rotation, and yeah, it's pretty darn close. As you roll above 12 o'clock with the CHARACTER knob, the pedal develops a gnarly growl that maxes into a dUg Pinnick-like snarl. The DRIVE function adds gain, girth, and eventually total meltdown, but settings in the 9–11 o'clock range can fatten up a clean sound with lots of rich, harmonic content.

Taking the VT DI out for a spin on some Americana gigs, my best results happened plugging my bass straight into the pedal and running it into my amps effect return, bypassing the preamp



and EQ sections. Engaging the +10dB boost on the 1/4" output gave me all the gain I needed to drive the 900-watt Class D power amp. I ran direct to the house PA from the XLR output, and kept the BLEND control at noon. Playing my G&L L-2500 in passive/series mode, mostly on the neck pickup, I dialed in what sounded to me like a classic Ampeg clean tone with the CHARACTER control between 11 and 12 o'clock, a touch of BASS and TREBLE, the BITE off, SPEAKER SIM on, and DRIVE at 9 o'clock. On a pickstyle tune, I rolled the DRIVE up to 11 o'clock (not to be confused with "11") and fortified the tone with some gristle. There was no doubt my amp sounded different than usual, but the dynamic response was still there, I could still feel the connection between my fingers and the attack—something I cannot claim to have experienced with digital models in live settings. Having gigged with the first version of the VT pedal, I can say the addition of the BLEND control, and the DI are the features that really make this pedal useful for live work.

In the studio, I ran the VTDI off the phantom power, and listened closely to the subtleties of the box. Coming through studio monitors, I liked running the BLEND up at higher settings; the native

compression of the SansAmp can be an advantage here, particularly in overdrive settings. With a Carvin PB5 in passive mode, I engaged the BITE switch and got clarity and definition, but switching the bass to active mode, I found it to be a little too bright, even with the BASS set flat. Turning off the BITE created some looseness in the low end, so I engaged the BITE function to regain the tightening effect of the subsonic filter, and rolled the HIGH control completely off, which still left me with enough high end to avoid mud. As I got more familiar with the controls, I found it simple to dial in a wide range of textures, and tailor them to a variety of instruments.

While it takes a little time to learn the VTDI's ecosystem, the powerful control it offers make this little guy worthy of being the front end of your gig rig—just add as much power as you can afford, and you're ready to rock. Or, you could treat it like a stompbox and use it in your pedal board (the pedal works best at the front of the effect chain.) But it's equally at home in the studio as an amp emulator, or a straight-forward preamp. Will it replace the mighty Ampeg in the hall of great tones? No, but the last time I checked, an Ampeg SVT will not fit in my gig bag, and this thing is damn close. **BP**

S SPECIFICATIONS

TECH 21	VT BASS DI Street \$209 Pros Powerful tone shaping, top-notch amp emulation Cons Separate the presence boost from the subsonic filter for more control. Bottom Line The VTDI is the next best thing to the real thing, and in some cases (like a second floor load in), maybe better. Contact tech21nyc.com
	Output 1/4" parallel, 1/4" out w/ +10dB boost, XLR w/ ground lift, -20dB DI pad Controls LEVEL, BLEND, LOW (312dB @ 125Hz), MID (312dB @ 500Hz), HIGH (312dB @ 3.2kHz), CHARACTER, DRIVE, BITE, SPEAKER SIMULATION Power 9-volt, optional power supply, phantom Dimensions 4.5" x 3.5" x 1.25" Made in U.S.A.