



TECH 21 Boost D.L.A.

BY KENNY RARDIN

At first glance, I knew Tech 21's analog delay emulator with clean boost was going to be something different because of the unit's layout and controls. The gold case features two footswitches: one for bypass and one for tap tempo. Above them are two small buttons labeled "trails" and "triplets." Two rows of knobs allow adjustments for Mix, Feedback, Tone, Time, Level and Flutter. On the sides of the pedal are the Input and output jacks, as well as the 9V adapter jack. The supplied manual was very informative and easy to understand, and offers some great sample settings for the types of effects provided. The build quality is excellent, and the battery compartment that clips the battery in place is a nice touch.

How Does It Work?

As far as adjustments go, this pedal has all the bases covered. It also addresses all of the shortcomings I've experienced with other delays. The mix control sweeps from

100 percent dry to 100 percent wet, which is important for two reasons. One is, of course, to get the proper balance of delay to the dry sound. The other is to allow for finer control of the delay, which makes this the first delay I've found that is truly useable in line before the front end of a distorting or clipping amp. I believe in placing the distortion or overdrive pedal before the delay (and reverb) so the trails don't fight each other in the sensitive environment of an overdriving amp's input. Although this isn't the way I'd recommend using a delay, sometimes it has to be done this way if there's no effects loop. And with this unit, it's possible to get a pretty decent delay sound this way.

The Feedback control can go from just one repeat to infinite repeats, and can even reach self oscillation levels like an old Echoplex. All those cool flying saucer sounds are possible here. Using the Trails button makes it possible

to keep the delay trails repeating and fading out after the unit is switched off.

The Tone control on this pedal is a thing of beauty. There is a longstanding debate among players about which are more desirable, the pristine clean sounds of a digital delay or the lo-fi tones of a good analog unit. Many analog units have differing degrees of this delay tonality, depending on the brand of the delay and the designer's ear. This one has literally all of them covered; from the clearest, brightest digital to the warmest analog, and all points in between. The control is very wide ranging, and I was able to duplicate the tones of any of my delay pedals quickly and with little effort.

The time control has a range of 30ms to 1000ms. Often with my older analog delays I find myself wishing for just a little more delay time to match the tempo of a song, but longer delay times—between 450ms and

600ms—tend to get too dark. This is not the case with the Boost D.L.A. All delay times had perfect tonality at any setting. If you like it dark, you can dial that in too. The Triplets button allows you to instantly set up those triplet sequences in perfect time. I achieved instant Pink Floyd delays just by activating this control and tapping the tempo.

Next is the Level control, which brings me to one of my pet peeves about many delay pedals: you go to do a solo and the volume drops out. What makes it worse is that the degree of the problem usually varies with the type and amount of distortion or overdrive you use. To help compensate for it, I've used small footswitchable boosts after the delay on some pedalboards. However, once again the Boost D.L.A. unit comes through. Unity gain is at approximately 12 o'clock on the dial, and up to 9dB of boost is available without changing the pedal's sound. No matter what type of tone you're using, you won't have dropouts.

Like similar controls on other units, the intent of the Flutter control is to simulate the tape warble of old Echoplex-type units, and this one works well. On the original echo units, this effect was random depending on quality of

your unit's motor and drives parts. Using modern technology, you can actually achieve the desired amount of this effect; it's not exactly random but it does sound similar. There is, however, another benefit to this control on the Boost D.L.A.: it can create lush chorus sounds on its own, with or without delay. Just using the Tone and Flutter controls, I was able to get some killer chorus tones that were extremely variable, making this a great feature.

The Final Mojo

I'll start by saying that this pedal does not have a hardwire bypass. Some players may be concerned about this, and the way it will interact with other pedals and devices. Normally, I'm a fan of true bypass, but I also realize that it can generate a noisy signal. In this case, because of the choice to offer a properly designed buffered system, I don't see any problems. I hooked it up to a true bypass strip and found no ill effects from it not being true bypass. Kudos to Andrew Barta and Tech 21—no unwanted compression or other artifacts were present. The Boost D.L.A. met or beat all my expectations of a delay unit. A lot of thought has gone into the design of this pedal, and they seemed to have covered all the bases. In the process, they've also set the bar a little higher for others. 

Buy If...

you're looking for a delay pedal that goes beyond the average feature set.

Skip If...

you're not over particular about delay sounds and you're happy with your old unit.

Rating...

4.5

ON THE Web



Click here to hear sound clips of the pedal in action at
premierguitar.com/reviews

Tech 21
Street \$149
tech21nyc.com