



Tech 21 XXL & XXL Bass Edition £99 each

The lauded XXL stompbox from Tech 21 lives again – and this time, thanks to a specific version, bass players in need of dirt are amply catered for by **Simon Bradley**

Of all the overdrive pedals that have been manufactured over the years, an old Ibanez Tube Screamer has to be among the most desirable, and collectors constantly trawl the net in search of one of these green beauties.

Not quite so sought-after is an original Tech 21 XXL, a unit launched in 1995 that's actually easier to use than a TS-9, and although a limited number of reissues – complete with a quasi-prismatic chrome front panel – have just been made available, new for 2005 are these two options. With the New York company's usual foresight they have also included a dedicated Bass Edition in the range.

We'll review both pedals at once, as the only difference between them aside from the chassis colours is the

If you're a four or five-stringer on the lookout for an over-the-top yet fully musical distortion, look no further than the powerful XXL Bass Edition

range of the tone pots. The black XXL features a pot that moves the centre frequency of the high cut from 1kHz to 10kHz at its two extremes, while the Bass Edition has a level-compensated pot that, when dialled in full, is actually flat. According to Dale Krevens from Tech 21, turning the pot towards its central position: "boosts the low end to compensate for the drop-out typically associated with effects that aren't

TECH 21 XXL & XXL BASS TEST RESULTS

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

■ **WE LIKED** The versatility is genuinely awesome

■ **WE DISLIKED** You will need to sit with them for a while...

specifically voiced for bass."

The Holy Grail of solid-state distortion effects is to simulate the tone of a valve amp. However, a significant part of this tends to be how the sound 'feels' – valve bloom, pick compression, note constriction and other factors that are equally silly in print all play a part in this. But essentially, pedal manufacturers have two options: either a preamp valve is →

TECH 21 XXL & XXL BASS EDITION

PRICE: £99

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Distortion

stompbox

PROGRAMMABLE: No

CONTROLS: Level, tone,

warp, drive

CONNECTIONS: Mono

input and output, PSU

input

POWER: 9V battery or

optional DC 100mA

supply

OPTIONS: The subtler

Double Drive also goes

for £99

Rocky Road

01494 535333

www.tech21nyc.com

The rivals

XXL

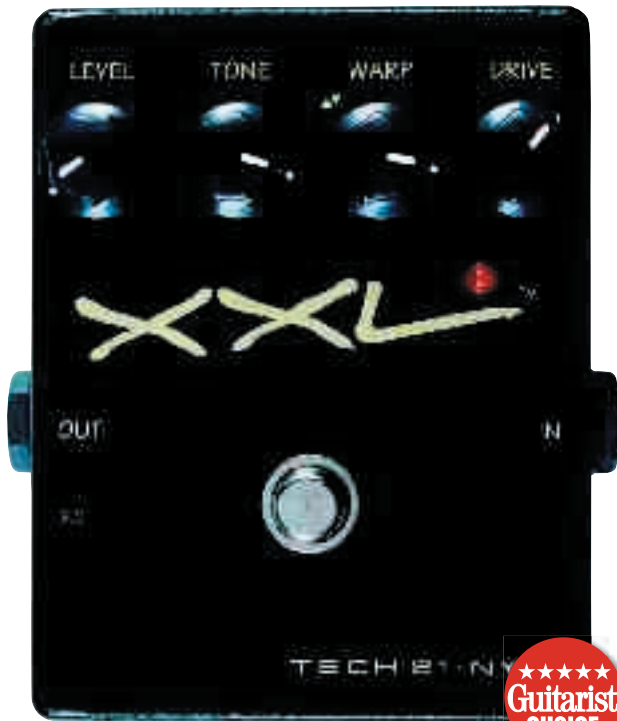
MXR Double Shot	
Distortion	£169
DigiTech Hot Rod	£89
BOSS OS-2	£55

Allowing you to toggle between two potentially different drive tones at the press of a switch, the Double Shot is built like a tank and, should you so desire, can sound like one too. As with the majority of DigiTech's excellent X-Series, the Hot Rod is extremely versatile thanks to the swathe of tone tailoring afforded by the pedal's morph pot. You can also connect it to a mixer or console via a dedicated second output. Slightly less versatile (but what a price!) is the OS-2. Thanks to its colour control, you can blend subtle overdrives with biting distortions and it's especially good with single-coils

XXL BASS EDITION

Pro Co Juggernaut	£199
BOSS ODB-3	£69
DOD FX91 Bass	
Overdrive	£69

Dedicated bass overdrives are more commonplace these days, allowing four and five-stringers to really get down. Of this suggested trio, the BOSS is arguably the cleanest and the DOD the most tonally versatile, with the Juggernaut's awesome filter, something that made the original Rat a favourite with bassists, producing some excellent low-down tones. Using guitar overdrives can give too tinny a tone, so if a dirty bottom-end is what's required, we do recommend searching out a specific bass unit



included in the spec, which can cause its own problems, or men in white coats produce an electronic circuit that comes close. Tech 21's interpretation of the latter is the warp control, an innovation that allows you to alter the influence harmonics have on your tone; it will also have an effect on how you actually play, but more on that later.

The level, tone and drive pots are self-explanatory, and the design includes mono in and output jacks. In conclusion, even though the chassis is sealed aside from a quartet of corner screws, the battery is accessed via an easily removed plastic cover.

SOUNDS: Even sitting with the XXL for just 30 minutes or so, you're struck by the wealth of tones available. What's more, adding or removing amp gain, the strength of your picking and even the width of your vibrato can all

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beneficially yet subtly alter your tone.

We should say that the warp control is a somewhat restrained beast and we suggest that you begin with it set to what Tech 21 call the median point, depicted by the two gold arrows on the pedal's front panel.

To get the most out of the unit it'd be helpful – although by no means essential – to have experienced amp power-tube drive; that way you'd better understand just how authentic the XXL can be. We managed to obtain a classic overdrive, an AC/DC-style crunch, a vintage-style germanium-based fuzz and even a vaguely woman-

like tone. That all-important feel is present and correct and, as a booster for solos, this is as effective and toneful as anything we've tried. The Bass Edition is just as versatile, although we would say that it tends to be much dirtier. The best-known exponent of the distorted bass has to be a certain Lemmy Kilminster and, for that Ace Of Spades intro, this is just the ticket. It's fuzzy without being overly thin and dirty and never strays into cacophonous mush. In fact, even with all controls bar the volume off, it gives a more than useable bass tone.

Verdict

We're aware of the ever-increasing number of great stompboxes out there, and these XXLs represent two more additions to your no-doubt already overcrowded 'must try' list. The Bass Edition is simpler to classify. If you're a four or five-stringer looking for an over-the-top yet musical distortion, look no further than this. It's simple to use and should last you a lifetime.

The guitar-voiced XXL is more tonally versatile and, although in practice it's a tad more complex to use, irrespective of the identical spec, it's well worth taking the time to tune it to your own guitar and style. In fact, we'd even go so far as saying it's good enough to base your entire tone around... which is praise indeed. ■



The XXL's warp control alters the influence harmonics have on your sound

Tech 21 XXL

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Tech 21 XXL Bass Edition

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