

# Tech 21 American Woman £119

A stompbox that bears the name of the man who supposedly coined the term 'overdrive' by Simon Bradley

★★★★★  
Guitarist CHOICE

Randy Bachman may not be the most renowned guitarist of all time, but his band – Bachman Turner Overdrive – are certainly well regarded. And in his previous outfit, The Guess Who, his solo during their 1970 single American Woman caught the ears of many a player, since earning its inauguration into the ranks of the greatest tones of our time.

With that bit of background in mind, it doesn't take a neurosurgeon to work out the concept behind the American Woman overdrive. But that's not to say that this blue-green little unit should be dismissed if you thought Randy Bachman was an XXX-rated classicist.

The conception begins with Tech 21's SansAmp PSA-1, a recording preamp that many of the biggest studios still swear by. The factory settings included a homage to the American Woman tone and Bachman, who himself came across the sound independently, suggesting it could be incorporated into a stomp box.

As ever with Tech 21, the pedal isn't simply an overdrive: it actually attempts to recreate the entire signal path that Bachman used to record the original solo. Therefore it includes the tonal aspects of his '59 Les Paul Standard, linked all-tube amps, studio-quality compressors, tape units, mics and so on, and how they all combine. Remember also that the song was recorded 33 years ago, when pin-sharp digital recording was hardly de rigueur.

We'll expand on the tonal aspects soon, but the design is pure Tech 21. It's ergonomic and is extremely tactile thanks to the Changing Rooms-style green 'splatter' finish to the steel chassis. Also featured are Randy's

scrawl and a logo based around the Statue Of Liberty, picked out in gold.

The pedal includes mono in and out jacks alongside a DC input for the optional nine-volt supply; the battery cover, easily removable, is sited on the unit's base plate. Of the four controls, three – level, tone and gain – are familiar. The fourth is a gate control, designed to filter as much extraneous noise as possible from the signal, which betrays the company's recording roots.

In addition, the gate and drive controls operate jointly in as much as the more gain you add, the higher the gate threshold needs to be. On the same subject, as any noise gate will depend on the type of pickups your guitar is loaded with and even your picking style, Tech 21 do recommend that you check the gate setting each time you plug the American Woman in.

**SOUNDS:** This pedal is unique in that it provides a signature tone, a stand-alone overdrive and a boost simultaneously, and we have to say that it really is the bee's patellae.

Those of you with more experienced ears will perceive that the generic tone of a '59 Les Paul fed through a valve amp and antique recording equipment

will be fat to say the least; as the original American Woman tone proves. Obviously the trick here is for Tech 21 to recreate the warmth and girth, and we can report that they have.

Bear in mind though that, depending on your guitar, set-up and, to a lesser but equally noteworthy extent, your technique, using the pedal isn't simply a 'plug in and go' affair. As we've suggested, fine tuning all four controls is a must to obtain the sound you're after and you should be prepared for at least a modicum of trial and error.

However, once you find the sweet spot, the tone is inspiring. With a clean amp it's fine, but adding a touch of gain allows the pedal to work its voodoo far more efficiently and it's possible to obtain the trademark Les Paul thickness from a single-coil; increase both the gate and the drive somewhat and you're just about there.

With the drive at higher settings, the tone does become more soupy – hardly a bad thing in fairness – and you'll soon discover that the single tone control is extremely effective. It has the ability to vastly alter the sound very quickly and, with additional treble dialled in to this organic gunge, you're left with a decent E-H Big Muff impression.

## Verdict

The pedal has the American Woman tone down to a tee. For more general uses it can add warmth to your tone, provide levels of subtle drive or even blow ears out should you so desire: versatility is the keyword here. We like the price too. Tech 21 has a winner. **B**

## Tech 21 American Woman

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

TECH 21 AMERICAN WOMAN

PRICE: £119

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive stomp box

PROGRAMMABLE: No

CONTROLS: Level, tone, gate & drive

CONNECTIONS: Input and output

POWER: 9V battery or optional DC-2 PSU

Rocky Road

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[www.tech21nyc.com](http://www.tech21nyc.com)

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## The rivals

DOD YJM308 £59

Dunlop JH-2 £99

Classic Fuzz £99

MXR DD-11 Dime £149

Distortion £149

Comprising simply gain and level pots, Yngwie Malmsteen's signature DOD pedal is far less complex than the man's music. Based on MXR's range of the classic DOD 250 overdrive, the pedal is warm, sweet and abrasive in equal amounts.

Dunlop's excellent JH-2 is part of their Jimi Hendrix range and is a compact and sturdy fuzz with plenty of super cool harmonics and warm mid-range – complete with germanium transistors. The brand new DD-11 is the latest addition to MXR's range of Dimebag Darrell pedals and is, as you'd expect, as aggressive as the man himself. With fully adjustable tone circuits, a 'Scoop' switch and obscene amounts of gain, this borders on a deadly weapon!

## TECH 21 AMERICAN WOMAN

### TEST RESULTS

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

**WE LIKED** The drive's warmth will answer many players' prayers

**WE DISLIKED** That we'll have to choose between this and the Double Drive