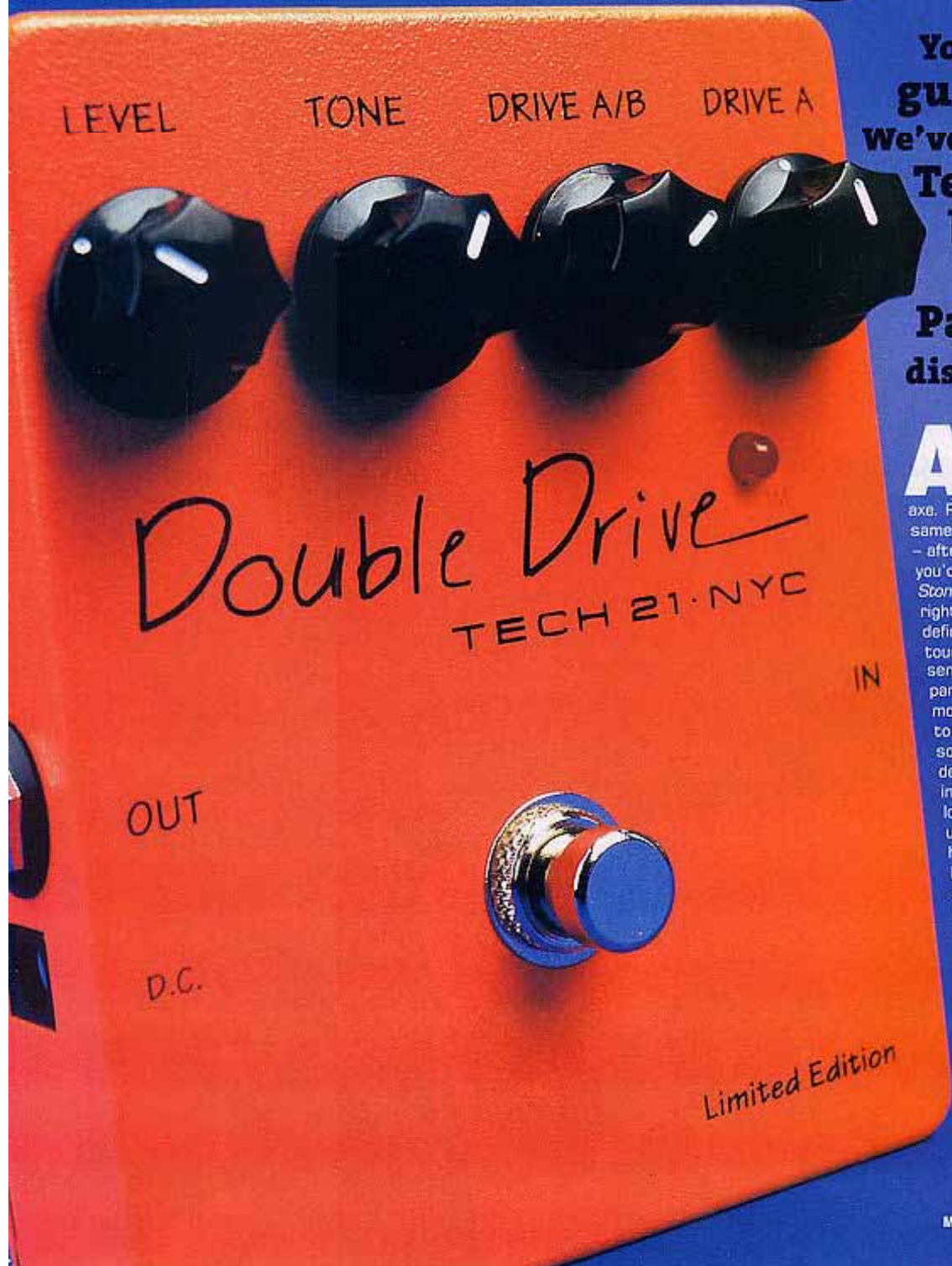
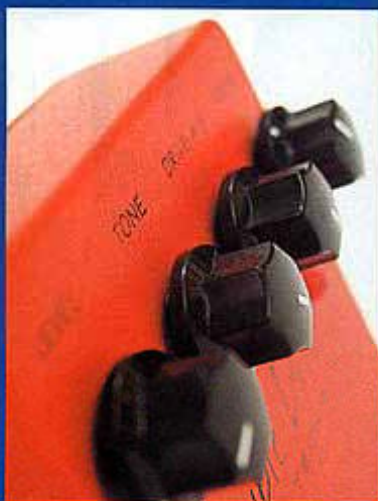


Doubling Up

You'll never guess what! We've heard that Tech 21 has been at it again... Paul Salter dishes the dirt

A good overdrive pedal will induce a similar kind of devotion you develop for your prized axe. Perhaps not to quite the same misty-eyed objectification – after all it's unlikely that you'd be holding a copy of *Stompbox Buyer* in your hands right now – but there's definitely something that touches upon that same sense of creative partnership that drives the more sentimental among us to give our instruments sappy names. Chorus and delay pedals just don't inspire the same kind of loyalty, and multi-effect units can be a little too high-tech to relate to, but because overdrive is often such a vital part of a guitarist's core tone and such a personal part at that, it's no wonder that finding one that works for you is akin to having a good mate that you can rely on.





GOLD STARS

- * Great tone
- * Effective drives
- * Durable chassis

BLACK MARKS

- Can't switch between drive types

Ideal for...

Classic amp-like drives without bleeding ears and tube meltdown

Tech 21 understands what makes a good overdrive. The company proved it on the release of the excellent original SansAmp amp emulator in 1989, and has been applying that know-how to products like the XXL and Comptortion pedals ever since. The latest example of the Double Drive is a limited-edition overdrive stompbox that has an intriguing approach to the concept, and also a personality that you may very well want to get to know a whole lot better.

CONSTRUCTION

Although the Double Drive is humble in appearance, the project-box-style cast metal casing is just the job for shrugging-off the inevitable heavy booted abuse that comes the way of all passionately employed stompboxes. In fact, take a flying leap at it from the drum-riser if you like, as short of knocking the knob settings out of whack there'll be no harm done – well, to the Double Drive at least.

Turning the effect on or off is quiet and smooth thanks to the electronic switching, and a high-input, low-output impedance configuration ensures that the unit delivers a healthy signal to the front-end of your amp, even with fairly long cables. There are the usual power options of the ubiquitous 9 Volt PP3 – which should have a reasonable lifespan with the quoted 5mA consumption – and a regulated 9V adaptor, however the Double Drive will also happily cope with an unregulated type as well.

In bypass mode (ie off), the Double Drive robs a tiny amount of the high end and transparency from your original, unaffected signal. That's par for the course with the vast majority of pedals and won't cause a problem for 99 per cent of players. Issue 19's ultra-transparent Full Tone Distortion Pro (£229) was on hand to provide the ultimate A/B test, and there's a discernable difference.



FEATURES

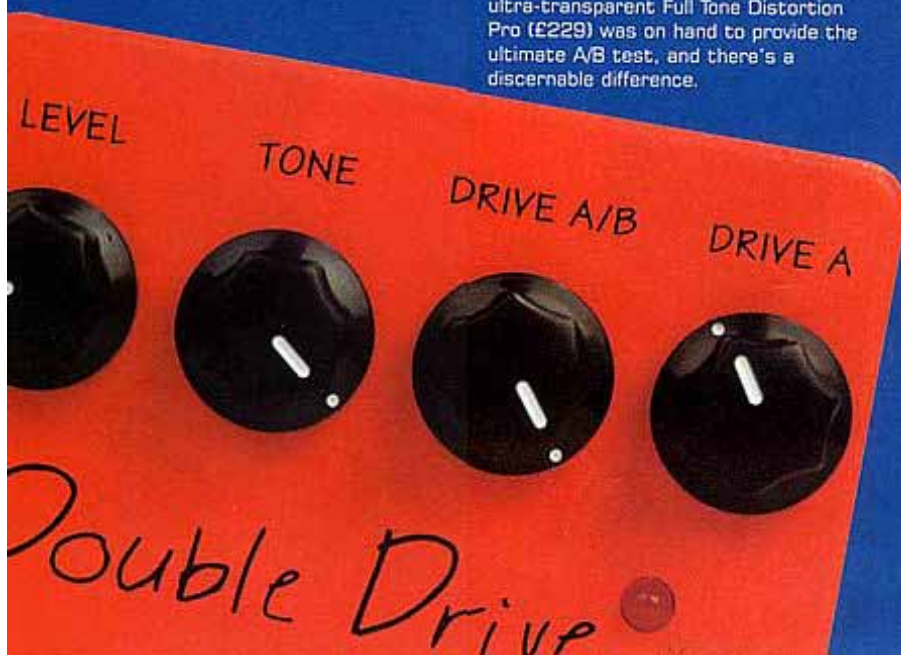
What makes the Double Drive stand out from the average overdrive pedal is that the drive is based upon the output stages of Class A and Class A/B valve amps, rather than just approximating preamp distortion. This is an interesting proposition because most aficionados state that this is where the real action is in a good valve amp. They have a point too, because if you were to hook-up an average overdrive pedal and the preamp output of a valve amp to an oscilloscope, you'd see very similar results. And it's also worth considering that most of the highly regarded classic drive tones come from non-master volume amps.

The Double Drive has an extra couple of tricks up its red-orange sleeve however; as each variety of drive has its own control which means you can balance them, with Drive A cascading into Drive A/B. Also Tech 21 has put in some work to make the tone control as effective as possible, attempting to make this low-pass filter more musical than the conventional type by shifting the high cut-off frequency from 10kHz to 1kHz. At the same time, it's claimed to have very little effect on the mid range, the aim being not to 'depersonalize' your guitar tone. It's a big claim.

Finally, 'level' is the overall gain knob which enables you to add anything from a simple clean boost – so say not altering the original characteristics of your amp – right through to a fairly huge jump in level.

SOUNDS

Curiosity being the powerful urge that it is drove us straight toward the 'class A' control. And considering that our cynically-tarnished expectations had already arrived, parked their metaphorical car and gone indoors for a cup of tea, the Double Drive would have its work cut out living up to Tech 21's claims. Happily it does just that, and we're suitably impressed because the class A section is not only loose and smooth with plenty of mid-range power, it responds to your playing with a realistic power amp squash at the appropriate levels of gain. Lower settings of the drive control usher that just-clipping region where so



Effects



many stompboxes fall down, yet here we're treated to a dynamic toneful crunch that cleans up nicely with gentle picking. A little more gain and the neck pickup beckons with the reward of some fat and expressive bluesy sustain. Flat out, things get decidedly messy, just as they could with a vintage Class A amp, but then again that's the time to switch to the Drive A/B control.

We're talking more of a master volume vibe here; a tighter drive with a slightly squarer character, but still not swamping the individual tone of the guitar, even right into the area of screaming leads and endless sustain. Blending in a little of the Drive A fattens things very satisfyingly, but it's best to be sparing with it – the sample setting with both drives on full is way overboard for our ears at least.

It never really gets into the scooped metal stuff, because the nature of the tone control is more to suit the pedal to your amp than anything else, but as soon as you turn to the right spot – and it's very obvious when you do – the Double Drive is one of the most 'natural' (ie amp-like) sounding overdrive pedals out there in terms of its gain structure.

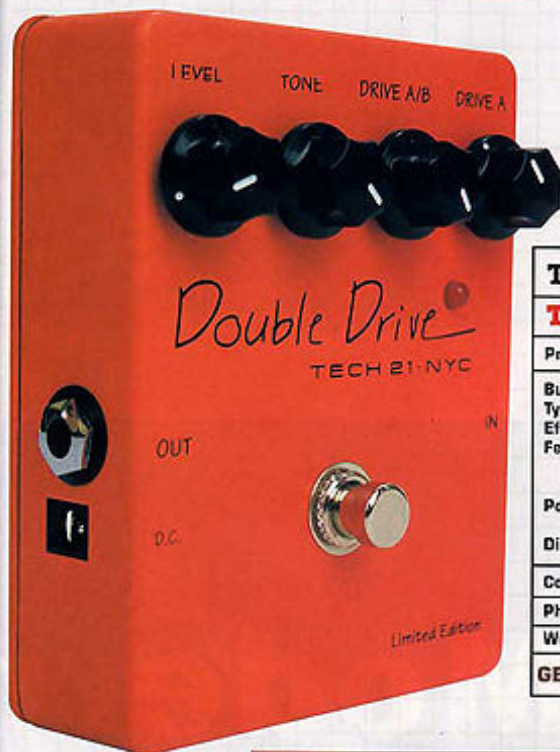
CONCLUSION

The Double Drive will make an ideal stompbox for anyone requiring a classic, expressive overdrive tone. Although it doesn't possess the out-and-out cascading gain of some, what is on offer is extremely satisfying and above all, rich and responsive. It's a bit of a shame that the option of switching between the two types of drive isn't available, and we're not too sure about the colour, but for boosting an already clipping valve amp, or as a sole source of overdrive it's up there with the best of them. Ultimately not as transparent in bypass mode as the boutique-type pedals, but then it's also half the price. It doesn't take endless tweaking to find the good stuff either – the right tone seems to jump out at you, regardless of the amp you're using. Definitely a keeper.

DETAILS

Boost It!

You can achieve a perfectly clean tone with this control turned right down, and set like this the Double Drive has impressive clarity. Wind things up slowly, and the Double Drive proves to be perfect for stimulating the front end of a valve amp with the level knob cranked. Tech 21 estimates that the Double Drive is capable of around 10dBs of boost in this manner, and the lack of artificial colour in the tone makes this pedal a great partner for a single-channel valve amp.



THE LOWDOWN

TECH 21 DOUBLE DRIVE

Price:	£99
Built in:	USA
Type:	Stompbox
Effect:	Overdrive/distortion
Features:	Level, tone, drive A/B, drive A, on/off switch, status LED, single input and outputs
Power:	9V battery or optional DC2 power supply
Dimensions:	114(h) x 89(w) x 38(d) mm
Contact:	Rocky Road Distribution Ltd
Phone:	01494 535333
Web:	www.tech21nyc.com
GB RATING	★★★★★★★

BACK TO CLASS



An amplifier's 'class' (A or A/B) refers to how the output tubes operate; very simply (the full explanation is much debated and a good deal more complicated), in class A – ie like a Vox AC30, Matchless DC30 – all four EL84 tubes operate all the time. With Class A/B however, the signal is split into two halves, with a separate device to handle each in a push-pull arrangement. This is a more efficient method as far as power goes, but the area of the signal that crosses the mid-point isn't quite perfect and generates another distorted element. Now in terms of guitar tones, both have desirable characteristics, hence the Double Drive's, or, double drives!