

Technical Knockout

Tech 21 Landmark 300 rack-mount bass amp head

By **Emile Menasché**

IT'S BEEN 15 years since Tech 21 introduced the original SansAmp tube-amp emulator, forever changing the sound of solid-state amps and giving credibility to concepts like direct recording and tube emulation. The company's Landmark 300 bass amp head continues that tradition. The little brother of the mondo Landmark 600, the 300 is a rack-mountable amp that pumps out 300 watts at four ohms (200 at eight ohms), offers two footswitchable channels and can operate as a D.I. preamp. Perhaps its proudest feature, however, is the one that has become Tech 21's calling card: great tube-emulating tone from a solid-state amp.

LAY OF THE LANDMARK

The Landmark 300's mission is to cover the sonic spectrum of bass. It can easily recall Ampeg- and Fender-style vintage tones and handily accommodate more modern sounds. Each of its two discrete channels sports a unique set of controls and has its own approach to tone shaping. You can switch between them via the front panel or with the included footswitch, which lets you keep both channels active at once as well as mute the amp for silent tuning. In addition to the channel selector, the front panel has a 10dB gain boost, which lets you tune the Landmark 300 to match your pickups' output and to drive the front end for more gain.

CHANNELS AND CONTROLS

Of the two channels, the more traditional is channel 1. It has controls for drive, bass, presence, blend, treble and level. As you'd expect, the drive governs the gain, and its range encompasses everything from ultraclean punch to overdriven grind. The bass and treble controls deliver 12dB of boost or cut, and

because they're capable of very dramatic tonal shifts, moving either even slightly can have a major impact on your sound. The presence control boosts detail-enhancing upper mids, while the blend control lets you mix a direct "clean" sound with the Landmark's SansAmp tube emulation. This is especially handy when you need to go "acoustic" with a piezo-equipped ax.

Channel 1's midrange is preset at the factory, but you can use the bass and treble controls to adjust the middle of your bass' voice. Boosting the bass and treble levels has the effect of a scooping mid cut at 740Hz. Cutting bass and treble produces the opposite effect (the equivalent of boosting at 750kHz). Both of these moves affect overall volume level, so you'll need to compensate with the level knob.

In terms of controls and tone, channel 2 is the more modern of the two. Like channel 1, it has controls for drive, bass, treble and level but boasts a semiparametric, rather than a

fixed, midrange EQ. The mid's sweep ranges from 170Hz to 3kHz, allowing you to dial in sounds ranging from tubby to boomy to bright, and everything in between.

I especially like the fact that Tech 21 doesn't make assumptions about which channel you'll use for clean or distorted tones. You can go from ultraclean to madly overdriven with either, and switch between them on the fly. The combinations are endless. My personal favorite: start with a creamy, vintage channel 1 sound, and add more punch by combining it with channel 2.

CONNECTIONS AND CABINET

The Landmark 300 is equally well equipped for stage and studio. Its rear panel connections include a pair of four-ohm 1/4-inch speaker outputs (wired in parallel), a SansAmp XLR direct out with ground-lift and level-selector switches that turn the Landmark into a formative preamp for live and studio applications. There's also a 1/4-inch preamp output and power amp input that together can function as a serial effects loop, and a tuner output that's active even when the amp's volume is turned down or muted via the footswitch.

I tested the Landmark with Tech 21's B410 4x10 speaker cabinet, rated for 400 watts at eight ohms. The rear-vented cabinet features a chrome-plated steel grille, along with four custom-designed, die-cast-frame 10-inch drivers. The B410 matches the Landmark head beautifully, translating the amp's punchy and warm low-end and midrange clarity while dishing out volume with impressive efficiency.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Landmark 300 may not have the fanciest feature set (no built-in compressor, for example), but it delivers an astounding range of full-bodied, musical tones. It gives you the tone tools and the power you need to really refine your own sonic personality, so despite its not insubstantial price tag, it goes down in my book as a technical knockout. ■

THE DEETS
LIST PRICE Landmark 300, \$895.00; B410, \$695.00
MANUFACTURER Tech 21, 790 Bloomfield Ave., Building B, Clifton, NJ 07012; (973) 777-6996; tech21nyc.com

