

SOLID STATE OF THE ART

Tech 21 Trademark 300

By **Eric Kirkland**

TECH 21 DESERVES a lot of the credit for the current wave of tube emulation and digital amp modeling—it was the introduction of the company's SansAmp amp simulator in 1989 that spawned the "amp-in-a-box" phenomenon to begin with. Ironically, their SansAmp products—including the Classic, PSA-1 and Bass Driver DI—rely entirely on analog circuitry, which is perhaps one reason why tone freaks like ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons tap the SansAmp for tube-approved amp sounds. These days, of course, Tech 21 makes genuine bass and guitar amps as well, and the company's latest offering—the solid-state Trademark 300—heads the demand for a big, rugged high-power head by mating a monstrous 300-watt power section to tried-and-true SansAmp tube emulation technology. The result is a stunning combination of pure power and impressive flexibility.

Smart Styling

Tech 21 products have always eschewed flashy aesthetics for a more purposeful appearance, and the Trademark 300's no-nonsense industrial look follows suit, with a vented front grille, a brushed-aluminum faceplate, and a nubby black Tolex cover with silver piping. (A vintage-style head is available by special order at no extra cost.) The Trademark Series 400-watt 8-ohm 4x12 cabinets are available with slant and straight fronts, and are loaded with Celestion Special Design speakers. They match the head's styling with a thick-waved black grille that takes the edge off the speakers' high end.

It's not just the Trademark's look that's industrial-strength: the amp boasts multiple layers of thermal and voltage protection, modular components and neat-as-a-pin wiring. For extra sturdiness, Tech 21 offers an optional rack mount kit as well, allowing you to pull the Trademark's chassis from the head cabinet and screw it right into your rack. The Trademark's back panel houses both series

and parallel effects loops, a tuner output, an XLR output for sending the SansAmp sounds directly to a PA or mixing desk, smartly color-coded speaker outs, a tuner output and a footswitch connection for channel-switching, boost and effects patching.

Three-Way Intersection

The Trademark 300's three individual preamps are designed to provide a remarkable collection of classic sounds in a variety of combinations. Each preamp channel includes a three-position slider that lets you choose between Tweed, British and California voicings (Fender-, Marshall- and Boogie-type, essentially), with EQ controls for low, mid, and high, and gain and level controls for each channel. There's an "FX2" mix knob for dialing in the amount of signal from the parallel effects loop, a master volume control and a cool boost dial that lets you add extra volume without affecting each channel's drive or EQ settings.

The handsome front panel also

features a single chrome-ringed input, a flat LED-style amp jewel and a power toggle switch. The included AR6 foot pedal provides individual buttons for activating each of the channels as well as the effects loop and the boost feature. One note: stepping on a selected channel's button a second time activates the boost just for that channel. By using this slick alternative to the master boost switch, you can choose to boost just the channel or channels you're using, instead of all three. Sweet!

Tone Trials

I tested the Tech 21's Tweed setting using my Relic Strat, and the Trademark 300 did an excellent job of recreating the organic sound of Fender's crisp early Fifties amps and robust Sixties blackface combos. With the boost control on and a Strat in my hands, I became a shameless SRV clone within minutes.

Switching to the Trademark's British mode, I was greeted by the famous SansAmp Marshall sound, with all the expected bloom and presence of a vintage stack. Cutting the mids and driving the treble transformed the amp into something akin to a Lee Jackson super-mod that needed only a slight Tech 21 boost to pump out serious metal tones.

Switching to the California setting put a powder keg of Mesa's best tones on tap by combining the MKII-C's bold top end with the Rectifier's exaggerated crunch. And talk about headroom! With 300 watts at your disposal, the Trademark 300 has more than enough volume and punch for any situation you're likely to encounter.

The Bottom Line

The Tech 21's intelligent design and its ability to deliver decades of coveted tube amp tones is as impressive as its awe-inspiring 300 watts of power. While the Trademark 300 delivers classic tones, its refined EQ section also allows guitarists to build further on the solid foundation of Fender, Marshall and Mesa tones, encouraging sounds that go well beyond the basic character of those great tube standbys. ■

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LIST PRICE: Trademark 300 head, \$995.00; Trademark 400-watt 4x12, \$795.00
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