

TECH 21 TRADEMARK 300 HEAD £699
 GUITAR AMPS. CD TRACKS 7-9



The control knobs are straightforward to use, with three channels, each with drive, level and

The rivals

- Hughes & Kettner Warp 7 head £499
- Marshall Mode Four head £650
- Peavey Triple XXX head £999

The Warp 7 has the same modern tone, but lacks the power to compete for headroom. The Mode Four is the Trademark's closest rival in terms of power and price. Unlike the Trademark it's optimised for the ultra powerful lows demanded by modern rock/metal. Peavey's Triple XXX is all-valve, delivers a superb range of tones and is ruggedly built, though the styling won't suit all tastes

The included AR6 footswitch allows you to select channels, toggle effects and boost functions

Tech 21 Trademark 300 head £699

Tech 21 gives us a salutary reminder that analogue solid-state is far from old hat. If you want to get a head, better try this one on for size by Nick Guppy

Tech 21's Trademark solid-state amplification range has been around for some time now and is based on the highly successful SansAmp preamplifier, which redefined the capabilities of transistors for many players. It only seems like yesterday, but the SansAmp has been around now for over 10 years, and for those in the know it's still one of the quickest and easiest ways of getting a great tone direct to tape, or into a PA.

Combining elegant design with non-sense features and a high spec, the Trademark amp range is a real and credible alternative to valves. In previous issues we've looked at the smaller models, now it's time to ponder the recently released 300-watt head which tops off the range and caters for the current demand for higher output.

Tech 21's products have always been built to a much higher standard than the majority of solid-state gear we've

seen, and the Trademark 300 is no exception. Despite the lack of corner protection the cabinet is made to a high standard. Whereas the rest of the Trademark range is fairly conservative in style, the aluminium louvres on the front (which are purely decorative) lend the 300 a moody, industrial look.

Being solid-state, the vast majority of the airspace here is for looks rather than function. The electronics are completely self-contained within a strong, closed-box steel chassis which can easily be adapted for rack use.

Inside, the chassis is well-protected, the power supply fed from a large donut-shaped toroidal mains transformer which makes up the bulk of the Trademark 300's weight. The electronics are all printed-circuit board, using a lot of tiny surface-mount components: six main boards hold the majority of the circuitry, with a number of smaller ones supporting jack sockets

and switches. Overall the construction is neat, tidy and tough enough to take the hammering of a professional band without needing special treatment.

The Trademark 300's control layout follows the same lines as the larger Trademark combo with three identical channels, each with separate drive, level and three-band EQ. Each channel has a three-way slider switch that radically alters the response and voicing to approximate three very well-known amp tones. Called 'California', 'British' and 'Tweed', these three voices cover a very wide range thanks to active EQ, which cuts or boosts levels by plus-or-minus 12dB. That's a lot of EQ, and to the designer's credit, virtually all of it is useable, with very little mid-range honk or nasality, while highs can be bright but not piercing.

The master section includes a mix control for the Trademark's parallel effects loop (there is also a separate series loop), a variable boost level which can add up to 9dB and an overmaster volume.

On the rear panel there's a proper XLR balanced recording output which features Tech 21's acclaimed SansAmp cabinet emulation, together with a switchable pad for connecting to pro or semi-pro equipment and a useful ground-lift switch. There are two pairs of send/returns for the dual effects





loops and a pair of loudspeaker outputs, along with a jack socket for the included six-button foot controller which selects channels, effects loops and toggles the boost function on or off. There's also a buffered tuner output for those players who like a final reassurance that they're in tune.

SOUNDS: A soft start is essential for amplifiers with a toroidal transformer – the advantage of a toroidal's very tight hum field is countered by a massive surch of current at switch-on, and without proper protection you can easily lose your loudspeakers. Once powered up, only the whirr from the cooling fan and the slightest amount of background hiss and hum let you know the Trademark 300 is ready to deliver its considerable output power. As far as noise levels are concerned, this is a very quiet and well-sorted design, with no clicks or pops from any of the channels when the footswitch is used.

Because each of the three preamps is identical in function, the Trademark has a degree of extra flexibility over other designs where the preamp voicing is fixed. Here, you can use the same sound across three channels with different drive and level settings for clean, crunch and lead functions; or choose completely different sounds to suit your own playing style.

As we often point out, the accuracy of amplifier emulations is down to individual opinion. Nevertheless the Trademark is adept at conjuring up very respectable facsimiles of the amplifiers you'd associate with those three voicing types: smooth, singing sustain from the Californian setting, aggressive mid-range punch from the British sound and bright, ballsy highs from the Tweed variation.

It's worth pointing out that this isn't digital modelling: the Trademark's circuitry is 100 per cent analogue, yet you can still be fooled into thinking that there's a hot glass bottle or two glowing away inside the chassis. It's very touch sensitive and responsive to

TECH 21 TRADEMARK 300 TEST RESULTS

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

WE LIKED Punchy, dynamic valve-friendly tones with huge headroom, and easy to dial-in
WE DISLIKED It would have been nice to see a more adventurous cabinet design with space for rack effects

player input which works especially well on the British and Tweed settings, where backing off on the guitar's volume or just picking with a little less gusto cleans up the sound without any harsh break-up. Moreover, it's a very transparent sound that keeps the guitar's character intact – you really notice the difference when changing from single-coils to humbuckers and the sounds shift accordingly.

Without needing to even glance at the manual, we were able to conjure up quite a few trademark sounds of our own within minutes of switching on this beast: Santana's singing lead tone, Angus' ripping crunch and Stevie Ray's choppy chord riffing are all achievable with a few deft twists of the controls. Wind up the volume and the Trademark 300 keeps delivering, up to and beyond the pain threshold. We wouldn't advocate stupidly high volume levels for any kind of music, however there's more than enough

clout available for anyone who needs it. Far more useful is the massive clean headroom this kind of output power delivers. Drop a chorus and delay into the parallel loop, adjust to taste and you're rewarded with some of the sweetest clean tones any amp can deliver, with every nuance audible even in the muddiest of live mixes.

Verdict

If you're in the market for a versatile, well-sorted head with massive power capability that doesn't tie you down to predefined sounds, we'd recommend you find one of these and plug into it at the earliest opportunity. It's slightly on the pricey side for solid-state, but not compared to the more sophisticated digital modelling types. If you can live without dozens of programmable presets and onboard effects, the Trademark 300 is a real contender.

We felt Tech 21 could have been a bit more adventurous with the cabinet design: given that there are two effects loops, it would have made sense to open up the redundant space over the chassis and use it for rack-mountable effects. When all's said and done though, it's hard to fault. Try it and see how your own trademark sound comes over. We think you'll be impressed. **B**

Tech 21 Trademark 300 head

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

TRADEMARK 300 HEAD

PRICE: £699

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Analogue solid-state three-channel head
OUTPUT: 300W mono RMS

DIMENSIONS: 300 (h)

x 635 (w) x 275mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 17/36

CABINET: Particleboard

CHANNELS: Three

CONTROLS: Channel x 3: drive, voice switch, low, mid and high, channel level. Master section: Parallel loop level, boost and master output level controls

FOOTSWITCH: Six-way footswitch (included) selects channels, toggles effects loops and boost functions

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Series and parallel FX loops, SansAmp speaker emulated line outs with ground lift switch

OPTIONS: 4 x 12

matching speaker cabinets (approx £399),

2 x 12 matching cabinet (approx £349), prices to be confirmed

RANGE OPTIONS: Other

Tech 21 amps include the

Trademark 10 combo (€299),

Trademark 60 combo (€599),

Trademark 120 combo (€899) and the

Bronzewood Acoustic combo (€599)

Rocky Road Distribution

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The rear panel features an XLR recording output featuring SansAmp cabinet modelling