

Never Too Much

Tech 21 Character Series US Steel, Oxford, and Leeds Pedals

On the heels of its success with the original Character Series pedals, Tech 21 is back with a hip new trio of boxes. This trifecta of grind – the Leeds, Oxford, and U.S. Steel – helps round out the popular series while paying homage to two great vintage British-style sounds and a high-gain monster. Each Character pedal has modeled voicings. For instance, you can go from a Deluxe to a Bassman sound using the Tech 21 Blonde pedal (reviewed in the April '09 issue). This holds true across the line, and there's a lot of cool/fun stuff to be found in

the in-between/hybrid tones you can create.

On the surface, the new Character pedals keep the same basic configuration as their siblings. Beyond the obvious differences in graphics, controls are the same – Level, Low, Mid, High, Character, and Drive – and as always, the proof is in the proverbial pudding.

Not for the faint of heart, the US Steel offers high-gain distortion and ear-bleeding lead tones. Its internal speaker emulation mimics a Celestion closed-back cab, and if you're going for low-end chunk, this box delivers, standing out as a metal rhythm-guitar wall of doom. On the other hand, controlling its top-end response *doest* take a bit of tweaking and the Character knob does a good job of keeping it reigned in.

The Oxford is an Orange-flavored gem. It may have the same layout, but its tones are much different – cool and much darker; it can go from a T-Rex vibe to Sabbath to Zeppelin with little effort. Add that the internal speaker emulation is based on a Vintage-30-loaded 4x12 cab, and you're guaranteed to rock. Classic-rock guys, in particular, will love the Oxford and, as with all of these pedals, the secret weapon is the Character knob.

Rounding out the trio is the Leeds – arguably the coolest of the three new pedals. From the Fane-style speaker emulation to the oodles of tone, it captures that rich, bell-like sparkle of British clean tones. Crank its Drive control and before you know it, you're

doing windmills! Tech 21 definitely did its homework on this box.

All of these pedals require spending some quality time in order to find their sweet spots. Typically, those unfamiliar with the Character series dial them in to sound slightly muddy or dark because they assume the controls serve only to boost signal. But the Low and High knobs are actually boost/cut controls – straight up 12 o'clock is flat. So, some experimentation can lead to surprising discoveries.

All three new Character Series pedals are impressive additions to the line. Each re-creates the intended vibe, whether going for a *Live at Leeds* or straight-out nu-Metal fierceness. Kudos to the crew in New York for giving tonejunkies some fun new toys. – Sean O'Bryan Smith VG

TECH 21 CHARACTER SERIES PEDALS

Price: \$169/each

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