

Character Judgement

Tech 21's Character Series Pedals

TECH 21, MAKERS OF THE renowned SansAmp amp emulator/direct-input, have ramped up their efforts on that front with their new Character Series of SansAmp pedals.

Offering flexibility that would've required mystic-like abilities when the original was introduced in 1989, the pedals in the Character Series focus on specific amp emulations.

Each uses Tech 21's all-analog/F.E.T. hybrid circuitry. All share a six-button design with control knobs for Level, Bass, Mid, Treble, Character, and Drive. Each knob reacts similar to the classic amplifiers they emulate, with the exception of the Character control – the “secret weapon” of each pedal!

Turning the Character knob shifts signal between the pedal's various amp emulations and

accesses in-between/combinations tones the amps themselves couldn't pull off. There's also a speaker simulator. A screen-printed graphic on each mimics the appearance of some of the amps that they represent, and finally, a true-bypass switch and sturdy aluminum chassis round out its build elements.

The five Character Series SansAmps represent amps by Marshall, Fender, Vox, Mesa Boogie, and Ampeg. The British pedal focuses on great Marshall amps like the JTM45, plexi, JCM-800, and even a '70s era metal-face. To maximize the effect, the pedal even has a greenback-style speaker simulation.

Tested with a Gibson Les Paul Special and Tech 21's Power Engine 60 amp, the British, dialed in to emulate the Bluesbreaker JTM45 gave the raw bite for

which the amps are known. Increasing the pedal's Drive control retained the warmth that this model is known for as well as yielding a very musical overdrive. Flipping to the bridge pickup and dialing in the JCM800 emulation gave a searing wall of rock that was nothing short of devastating. This pedal knows how to rock!

The Fender-inspired Blonde pedal has the same controls, but is a different animal. Its emulations are more the tweed, blond, blackface, and silverface variety. The speaker simulation also changed with the Blonde to emulate a standard 12" Jensen-style speaker. With a modified Tele, a clean Blackface emulation shone right out of the box. Apparent from the beginning was the amount of warmth the Blonde offered. Pushing the Drive control gave a very natural amp breakup, as well.

The Blonde truly shows its many personalities plugged in direct on a master session. Using a Stromberg Newport with the Blonde dialed to emulate a '59 Bassman resulted in a jazz fanatic's dream tone into a Nu-endo session. There was no need

for mic'ing an amp or using a plug-in; the Blonde sounded and reacted like an amplifier. The Blonde sounds wonderful tracked with hollowbody or solidbody electrics.

From Tech 21's homage to the Mark II (the California), the singing AC30 inspired love of the Liverpool, or the fliptop sounds attributed to the Motown sound in the VT Bass, each pedal accurately recreates many amps of old.

For musicians who do not have the luxury of owning all of these classic amplifiers or would rather not tote out their beloved classic, the Tech 21 Character Series pedals are well worth a solid look. Home-recording enthusiasts will particularly appreciate the ease of use.

As with all things in the gear world – especially vintage gear – there's give and take. Are the tones of the CS pedals a duplication of classic amps? No. But Tech 21 named these accurately; if you want to catch the character of these great amplifiers, they're a strong alternative – practical and efficient. – **Sean O'Bryan Smith**

TECH 21 CHARACTER SERIES

Price: \$195

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