

Tech 21 Bronzewood

Price: £549 For a company that introduced the SansAmp, can we really expect lush acoustic tones from its latest acoustic amp?

IN THE DECADE SINCE THE launch of its ground-breaking and hugely successful SansAmp pedal, Tech 21 has developed a whole range of like-minded stompers and amplifiers. The SansAmp is, of course, a compact, solid-state 100 per cent analogue unit which emulates valve amp and speaker tones convincingly, primarily for DI operation.

One of the spin-off ideas is the Acoustic DI, which does a similar job for electro-acoustic guitars. This unit offers all the regular DI box features, plus active three-band EQ, an effects loop and, most importantly, the SansAmp emulation circuitry. For this unit it has, understandably, been modified to produce the soft, clean harmonics of a microphone/valve preamp

combination, rather than an electric guitar's valve amp sound.

As with this company's all-transistor electric combos, the Trademarks 60 and 10 (reviewed in *Guitarist* September 2000), that deploy a degree of SansAmp pedal circuitry, the similarly styled Bronzewood 60 acoustic combo carries over some of the Acoustic DI's features and combines them with standard acoustic amp necessities.

Anyone who regularly gigs with an acoustic guitar will know that getting a credible yet loud amplified sound is a challenge fraught with compromises and exasperation. No matter what the on-board system on your electro-acoustic may be,

The rivals

• Marshall AS100D	£570
• Trace Elliot TA 100R	£869
• Ashdown Radiator 2	£699
• Roland AC-100	£829

so much depends on what you plug into. Though other acoustic amp manufacturers have offered similar warm harmonics controls to soften the harsh piezo pickup tone, Tech 21, with its extensive experience and success at manipulating transistor-based circuitry, should have a unique insight into the matter.

What's it made of?

Essentially, the Bronzewood 60 is put together just like its electric sibling, the Trademark 60, with only

Spec check

TECH 21 BRONZEWOOD 60
PRICE: £549 **ORIGIN:** USA
TYPE: Dual channel, solid-state acoustic combo **OUTPUT:** 60W RMS **DIMENSIONS:** 508mm (w), 279mm (d), 432mm (h)
WEIGHT (KGLB): 17.2/38
CABINET: MDF, open back
SPEAKERS: One Tech 21 12-inch driver, one Tech 21 horn
CHANNELS: Piezo/magnetic pickup channel with single jack input, microphone channel with balanced XLR input
CONTROLS: Guitar channel: in/out switchable compressor, phase switch, preamp gain, in/out switchable notch filter, semi-parametric mid EQ, active low/high EQ and blend (for mixing in SansAmp tube/mic emulation circuitry). Mic channel: phantom power switch, gain, active three-band EQ, reverb mix (Guitar/Mic channel balance) and level. Master reverb (Accutronics) and master level
FOOTSWITCH: For reverb on/off (not included)
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Headphone socket, external speaker input, SansAmp XLR direct output, ground-lift switch and effects loop
OPTIONS: Power Engine 60T 1 x 12 powered cabinet (£295), Tech 21 FSWA footswitch (£30) and black vinyl cover (£35)
CONTACT: Rocky Road Distribution 01494 535333
WEB: www.tech21nyc.com

electrical and slight stylistic differentiation. Although Tech 21 has opted for a predictable brown colour scheme, the tough, textured synthetic crocodile skin that enwraps this sturdily-built MDF cabinet makes an exotic change. The amplifier basics checklist is otherwise fairly typically ticked off – metal corner protectors (screwed on, not riveted), durable rubber feet and an ergonomically squidgy, chunky stitched leatherette handle.

The removable front panel has a tough, fibrous, hessian material grille, edged with plastic piping. Pulling it off



A new mood: potent EQ, smooth sound and bonus options



The internal horn can be disconnected, for electric guitar use

reveals the slightly off-centre mounted 12-inch driver and top-right mounted horn – obviously Tech 21 gets these made elsewhere, but keeps the manufacturer under its hat.

Checking these out from the rear opening you can easily spot their parallel connection via removable spade-ended wires, the horn's half of the circuit receiving a concealed inline high frequency crossover device (a capacitor) thoughtfully secured to the driver housing.

The user manual actually suggests you can pull the horn wires off if you want to disconnect it and the amp will still function as normal – making a clean power amp suitable for coupling with something like a SansAmp pedal for electric guitar applications.

Looking inside you also find that the full length, three-spring Accutronics reverb unit is shrouded in its own black vinyl jacket for protection from typical gig contaminants. The brushed steel and aluminium amp enclosure sports a clearly laid

out, face-up control panel, perfectly recessed for protection of the knobs. Its little army of chicken-head pots makes a neat, space-saving user interface for this conscientiously designed

acoustic combo.

Each different manufacturer's acoustic combo seems to possess at least one unique feature amid a host of standard necessities. Here, we've got your ultra-high impedance guitar channel input, your feedback-killing notch filter (variable between 50-300Hz) and phase reversal and your semi-parametric mid EQ essentials. But Tech 21 has seen fit to slip in an onboard compressor and, importantly, some of its own SansAmp Acoustic DI tweaks.

As well as offering patented circuitry to warm up those harsh piezo nuances, you've got useful DI box extras on the rear panel. This combination results in a balanced XLR direct out, which, in true SansAmp style, is more likely to reproduce the actual live sound of the Bronzewood 60 and offers a pro-quality interface for direct-to-desk recording and on-stage connection. The corresponding 'ground lift' will defeat any earth related hum.

This is also the connection by which you can link up a Power Engine 60T powered extension

cabinet, with extra cabinets then able to be chained from that, letting you multiply your output by as many 60W factors as you need, or can afford.

It's good to see that both channels have their own input gain (though still no clip meter/LED), so signal-to-noise can be optimised. Obviously this combo is much less mini-PA orientated than some, and in some ways less flexible on the input and external effects routing side of things.

You'll need an extra DI box to use the microphone channel with, say, a second magnetic soundhole pickup, unless you have a separate pickup blend system. In reality, most applications will only need the one input and the guitar channel on the Bronzewood 60 is capably equipped.

Sounds

Impressive in its command of the electro-acoustic tone, the exceptionally potent EQ section of this combo does pretty much all you need to render your amplified sound as smooth and credible as you'd ever want – the other options are a bonus.

Switching in the on-board compressor may increase the hiss factor on this otherwise quiet runner, but if you are a fairly dynamic player then you'll be impressed by the improved detail that a reasonable dollop of compression gives to the softly picked passages; it can help compensate for poor string to string balance on your pickup, too.

Compression can, however, exacerbate feedback problems, so you tend to have to decide on a suitable amount before you attempt to achieve your particular sound, then set preamp, notch, EQ and master level values around that.

As for the SansAmp tube/mic emulation circuitry, it's just a matter of taste: if your ears are used to the soft, cosy compression

of valves then it will greatly appeal to you, but the outstanding EQ section is actually the real factor in slapping your piezo pickup into shape. It sounds no more acoustically natural with these overtones blended in, but succeeds in making your piezo pickup sound more like a magnetic soundhole type.

Despite the obvious quality of this Accutronics reverb, when applied generously a spring system like this can prove a bit noisy and a bit gurgly sounding for the subtleties of acoustic tone. With this amp's very basic effects loop (no controls over in/out level or mix), you might find the on-board reverb to be your only practical option.

Whether it's due to the open-backed cabinet, or the particularly craftily designed and manufactured speakers, there's a superb range of reproduction from this combo, never harsh-edged and searing, only crisp yet well-rounded.

Verdict

Considering its US origin, the list price that UK distributor Rocky Road gives the Bronzewood 60 isn't bad at all, and compares competitively with similar products. It lacks the input routing capabilities of some counterparts, but the electronic pathway connecting what goes in to what comes out is as finely honed and sensitive to requirements as you could want.

Tech 21 proved its wisdom on acoustic guitar pickups with the Acoustic DI. This combo is an inspired follow-up. Without the valve vs transistor issue being so relevant to acoustic amps, the Bronzewood 60 is free to stand out, unquestionably, in its class.

Matthew Wig



Chicken head pots save space on this neat combo design

BRONZEWOOD 60	
BUILD QUALITY	●●●●●
FEATURES	●●●●○
SOUND	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●○
VERDICT	●●●●●
WE LIKED	The excellent EQ, useful DI features and, of course, the nice skin chic
WE DISLIKED	The shortage of inputs and effects loop controls, no input meter