



TECH21

SansAmp Bass Fly Rig v2

The new Fly Rig variant of the venerable SansAmp meets the editor's boot

ROCKY ROAD
www.rocky-rd.com

£399

Tech21's groundbreaking SansAmp, the innovation of electronics whiz Andrew Barta, was first sold in 1989. Its core idea was and remains that it enables the user to emulate an amp and cab while requiring neither, instead sending a signal to a recording desk, a PA or (nowadays) a computer soundcard. It's been widely supported in our world, with varying models assigned to celebrity bassists, and a portable version, the Fly Rig, which was first manufactured in 2014. This v2 version of the Fly Rig offers bassists a few new options in addition to its primary function – to offer the SansAmp technology in a highly portable unit.

The idea of touring without an amp, as well as recording without one, is increasingly attractive in the era of aggressive airline staff and

digital workstations, so this unit – only about a foot long and weighing around 12 ounces (350 grammes), is doubly welcome. As Tech21 eloquently put it, “No crackling patch cables, dying batteries or ground loops... No dreading cheesy backline loaners and overheating at the mere thought of your touring rig going down.”

The Fly Rig comes in a metal box that appears strong enough for most purposes, and Tech21 have wisely included a power supply with multiple plug adaptors for different continents. You might expect these details to be taken care of at the midmarket price of this unit, but you'd be surprised how often they're ignored – and while we're on the subject of price, note that cheaper, broadly similar preamps are certainly available, but they don't have the particular



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £399 RRP

(NB: street price will be lower)

Made In | USA

Features | Analogue SansAmp tube amp emulation circuitry (two modes), 2 x Drive controls, 2 x Level controls, Bite switch, active post-EQ (+/- 12dB), compressor, Octafilter, Fuzz and Chorus controls, chromatic tuner, 0.25" 4.7megOhm input, input pad for active basses, XLR out, 0.25" low impedance out, speaker simulation defeat switch

Power 9V DC power supply (included) with interchangeable international plugs

Dimensions | 12.5" (L) x 2.75" (W) x 1.3" (D) / 318mm x 70mm (W) x 30mm (D)

Weight | 12.5oz / 354g

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Solid build, portable, excellent tone options and extras

Minus | More affordable alternatives exist

Overall | It's the SansAmp you can put in a bass case – a splendid bit of kit

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★☆☆



SansAmp tech or heritage. If that isn't essential to you, though, make sure you look elsewhere, as there are plenty of other options.

Running from right to left, or in to out if you prefer, the unit is split into four sections, with a compressor up front in the signal chain, then the SansAmp section itself, followed by an octaver and fuzz, and finally a chorus and tuner. Each section is illuminated with a different colour, the rotary controls themselves lighting up brightly, and there's an effects loop and XLR out if required. While none of this sounds particularly complex, you'd be advised to check the manual before you plug in. I know you won't, though, so have some fun making weird noises before you come to your senses and take the advice provided.

Plugging in, the first thing you come across is a pad button for active basses. If you're in the habit of ignoring this option, take it seriously on this occasion, because the Fly Rig's controls are super-sensitive and you'll max everything out very easily. If you do clip, by the way, the Chorus button lights up as a warning, which is useful. Once you're in, you have two channels to choose from, one equipped with a Character button for extra presence; each channel has a three-band EQ, Level and Drive control which come to life when the SansAmp circuit is activated and provide you with the overdrive for which SansAmps are renowned. As the helpful diagrams in the manual reveal, various combinations of drive and EQ will give you mildly crunchy tones, via full-on distortion, to the kind of ear-bleeding sonic maelstrom that will kill cows at 100 paces.

You can combine your overdriven tone with the octaver/fuzz controls if you're brave and skilful enough. This requires some judgement if you want to avoid making your tone into chaotic sludge, but with the controls used carefully, it can be done. Lose the SansAmp component, though, and the combination of octave and fuzz – modulated with a Range control as a tone pot – will give you all sorts of slippery wah and filter options. Finally, there's a single-control chorus, which combines the usual depth and range controls pretty efficiently, and a simple-to-use tuner. You can also 'defeat' the cab simulation feature if you wish.

The Fly Rig is a solid chunk of metal, and is equipped with silent switching, a boon given all the controls. I'm very impressed with how well the signal chain is planned, and each option is effectively designed and laid out. Whether you're new to the SansAmp concept or a newbie, you'll enjoy its comprehensive functionality – but as I said before, competing products are available, so do try before you buy. ■