


Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver Test

[Translated from German*]

Rainer Wind 10.02.2025  5 / 5  0 0

In the Sansamp series, Tech21 has been offering analog preamp/di solutions since the early 1990s, which bring the rich, tube-like sound of classic amplifiers into compact pedals. With the Sansamp XB Driver, the US company recently introduced its most complex and powerful sansamp pedal, into which the developers have gripped their entire experience from the last 30 years. The two-channel preamp combines the most important features of Tech 21's most popular bass preamps "SansAmp Bass Driver DI", "Para Driver DI", "Q Strip" and "dUg Pinnick Ultra Bass 1000" in a single device and should therefore be extremely widely positioned in terms of sound. According to Tech21, the range of the fully analogous sound machine ranges from traditional vintage sounds to modern metal threading – undoubtedly a self-confident announcement! We were supplied with the Sansamp XB Driver and are curious to see if the latest sansamp swings is really setting new standards in terms of sound flexibility.



First impression

The Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver is a completely analogue two-channel preamp (Clean & Drive), which is operated with a whopping 15 controls and various switches. It should be clear that a pedal with these specifications cannot be built in mini format. With dimensions of 19 x 12.1 x 5.1 cm, the new Sansamp pampamp is not an unwieldy block, because the pedal can easily find space even on small pedalboards and is not overweight with 200g.

The technology sits in a console-shaped metal housing, which is extremely stable and should have grown to the harsh everyday tour routine. In principle, the processing of the pedal is absolutely blameless. All components work in high quality and the controllers run closely so that the positions can be targeted.

Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver controls

This would mean that we would be directly with the numerous control elements that are enthroned to set the sound on the top of the preamp. Despite the impressive number of 15 controllers, the operation is relatively slightly off the hand, since the controllers have been installed in two rows.

The upper row is responsible for the clean channel and the lower one for the drive channel. For optical recognisability, the two controller series with different colours are removed from each other – grey stands for "Clean" and black stands for "Drive". The first five channels of the two channels are identical and each consist of a level control for the output volume and an active three-band equalizer, which is operated with a bass controller, a height control and two controls for the mids (mid and mid shift 100Hz-2kHz).

The drive channel offers two additional EQ features: The bite switch provides the sound with more definition if necessary, and with the pre/post switch you can position the center filter either before or after the distortion.

There is also a comp controller for the clean channel to adjust the compression strength of the integrated FET compressor, while the drive channel is equipped with a drive controller, which is responsible for the degree.

Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver: “Bi-amping, Baby!”

However, this does not mean that, because the opulently equipped Preamp offers three more controllers. On the far left is the slightly larger master controller for the overall volume of the pedal, and in the right area we find the two controls “LPF” and “HPF” (lowpass and high-pass filter with a control range of 100-1000Hz each). Both filters only act in combination with the mix function, which mixes both channels together at the touch of a button when needed.

Bi-amping is the magic word here! With the clean channel, for example, a greasy and powerful low-end can be created, which is strongly compressed and freed from high-frequency parts with the LPF filter. The drive channel then provides the distorted portion of sound, in which the low frequencies with the HPF filter were completely removed. The result is a brutal sound wall with the best carrying capacity and immense assertiveness!

The mixing function is activated with a kick on the right foot switch, and the two filters are switched separately with the so-called crossover switch, which sits under the bass controllers. The channels are then split and mixed back together including the LPF and HPF settings.

Two more foot switches make the end on the front: With the Clean/Drive button, if you are not in mix mode, and the obligatory on/bypass button switches the preamp or off (buffered equipped with brightly illuminated LEDs, which clearly signal the operating status of the bypass). By the way, all three foot switches are equipped with brightly illuminated LEDs, which clearly signal the operating status of the respective function.

Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver: Connectors

The youngest member of the Sansamp family is not only lavishly equipped with sound tools, but also scores with a remarkable shot-up periphery. There are a total of five jacks, an XLR connection, and the mains connection for connection to the supplied 18-volt power supply. On the left we find the input to the connection with the bass, followed by the tuner-out for the tuner and the send and return latch for inserting an effect device.

The input can be attenuated by 10dB for high-level active bass with the PAD switch, while at the same time the impedance is reduced to 10k ohms. On the right side, the starting jack parks to connect with the amp. The signal of the output can be lifted by 10dB with the Boost switch (To: 0db, From: -10dB).

The symmetric output in the form of an XLR socket for connecting the pampin with a desk or audio interface is completed. For the output there is a ground lift and another switch, which serves to choose the signal strength between mic level (-20dB) and line level (0dB).

Intuitive usability

The Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver is relatively complex for a bass preamp and offers numerous functions, thanks to a sensible controller layout and unambiguous labeling, the operation is still comparatively intuitive and to be achieved by experienced bass people almost without any view of the user manual. Only the functions of the crossover switch and the post/pre EQ switch were not immediately clear to me – but with a brief look into the manual, the fog has cleared itself in no time.

Speaking of pre/post EQ: This feature is a tool that should not be underestimated for tuning the distorted sound: “Small switch, big effect”, so to speak! In pre-mode, the semi-parametric center section sits in front of the amp simulation and thus acts directly on the character and response of the distortion. With the two centre modules, you can thus adapt the zersound to your own taste in a very targeted way.

In post mode, on the other hand, the centre section is located behind the amp simulation, so that you can basically only mix the distortion sound with the equalizer. This also has its charm, but in my opinion the first variant usually leads to more homogeneous results.

But whatever way, we get on board and listen to how the opulently equipped sansamp preamp makes itself sound and whether it is really as flexible as Tech21 says. For the recordings, I connected the balanced XLR output to my audio interface and captured the signal to the hard disk using Logic Pro X.

Conclusion

Tech21 do not promise too much if they promote their new Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver as the most complex and sonically flexible preamp in the Sansamp family. The key to the truly enormous variety of sounds is the mix function, and on the other hand the low and high-pass filters, which enable sounds used in combination, for which bi-amping stacks were previously needed.

In principle, the sound can be fine-tuned with the numerous great EQ tools, so that an enormously wide range of **overdrive sounds** is available. Modern, fiercely chopped sound walls in darkglass style are just as feasible as classic rock sounds or wonderfully warm, slightly dragged vintage sounds – always with the best assertiveness and full load-bearing capacity! But used separately, the two analog channels also deliver first-class sounds, which can be easily switched during live operation at the footstep.

The Tech21 Sansamp XB Driver is really cheap with an open price of currently 671,- Euro. Given the first-class sound quality, immense sound flexibility, and not least because of its impeccable workmanship, the pedal is worth every penny in my eyes. I can only warmly recommend the recent Sansamp preamp to any overdrive fan!

★ 5 / 5

Pro

- + clean and distorted sounds in the best quality
- + Mix function with LPF and HPF
- + High sound flexibility
- + lavish features with connections
- + Built robust
- + Power supply included

Contra

- /-

***For the original German version
+
Audio Samples, click here:
[https://www.bonedo.de/artikel/
tech21-sansamp-xb-driver-test/](https://www.bonedo.de/artikel/tech21-sansamp-xb-driver-test/)**