

## Drive my Bass

Das neue Tech-21-Pedal soll nicht weniger als DER Bass Driver schlechthin sein, und die wichtigsten Features aus über 35 Jahren Firmengeschichte vereinen. Ein Driver, sie alle zu knechten? Das hören und sehen wir uns doch mal an!

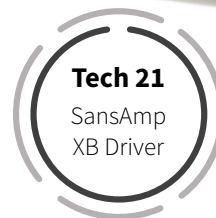
The new Tech 21 pedal is intended to be nothing less than THE bass driver par excellence, combining the most important features from over 35 years of company history. One driver to rule them all? Let's hear and see!

The basic design is borrowed from the two-channel amp head "dUg Ultra Bass 1000," the now discontinued signature model for Doug Pinnick of King's X. Additional features come from the Q-Strip, which is modeled on the channel strips of a vintage mixing console, and the ever-popular Bass Driver DI and Para Driver DI.

### CONSTRUCTION

There are plenty of controls, switches, and connections – fortunately, everything is well and logically organized. Everything is housed in a sleek, cleanly deburred metal case. It's not the smallest, but not much larger than, for example, the Programmable Bass Driver DI. Furthermore, all connections are mounted on the front, making it pedalboard-friendly. Input is via the input, next to which a push-button switch provides 10 dB of pre-attenuation for high-volume instruments. There's no built-in tuner, but there is a tuner out. The send and return form the insert path, which is located at the very end of the circuit, directly before the output drive. They are located to the right of the socket for the included 18V power supply. The unbalanced jack socket can be boosted by 10dB via a switch, for example, to directly drive a power amplifier. The balanced XLR output can be switched between line level and microphone level, and a ground lift is also switchable to eliminate ground loops.

The controls are color-coded, not only by their gray and black backgrounds, but also by their color: silver for the clean channel and the master control on the far left, and red for the drive channel. The EQ is identical in both channels: treble and bass (at 3.2 kHz and 80 Hz) plus semi-parametric mids, i.e., a boost/cut control, and a frequency control with a wide adjustment range between 100 Hz and 2 kHz. I'll cover the next two in more detail later. On the far right, there's an adjustable FET compressor in the clean channel, and the corresponding drive control for the input gain in the drive channel.



Between the lower row of controls and the footswitches are three more switches, somewhat inconspicuously located. Bite, as the name suggests, adds extra bite to the drive channel, while Pre/Post shifts the position of the midrange EQ in the channel. Connected before the SansAmp amplifier simulation, the channel behaves similarly to the Para Driver, coloring the distortion. After it, it works similarly to the classic Bass Driver, processing the drive sound after the SansAmp stage. The last switch brings the crossover, and thus the two remaining controls, into play, splitting the signal into clean lows and (if desired) distorted highs.

The low-pass filter can be used to cut the high frequencies between 1 kHz and 100 Hz in the clean channel, while the hi-pass filter removes the lower frequencies in the drive, also between 100 Hz and 1 kHz. Both channels can therefore overlap and process a range together, or a gap can be created, specifically between 100 and 1000 Hz, which is "cut" from both. A powerful and effective tool, as we'll hear. What the pedal doesn't offer, however, are connections for aux-in and headphones.

So it's clearly designed for use in the studio or on stage; for a quiet room, you'll have to tinker with something. (I simply connect a NUX Mighty Plug Pro to the output, then get the signal on my headphones and can stream tracks via Bluetooth.) Considering the jam-packed front panel, I think that's okay.

## SOUND, SOUND, SOUND

As always with Tech 21, you can enjoy the excellent sound suggestions in the manual when testing. They accurately reflect the models, even more so when the appropriate instruments are connected. For the test, I'll first use the clean channel. I set the smooth-turning EQ knobs to the non-locking center position, leave the compressor out, and adjust the level to the bypass signal. It doesn't sound neutral, but rather a bit thickened and slightly rounded. [The Clean channel] feels very tactile when playing and fits perfectly into the [mix] band sound – "mix-ready" and/or "live-ready," you could say. The EQ doesn't require much movement of the knobs to take effect, and the midrange is responsive within a wide but reasonable range. With this alone, I can easily tailor the bass tone to exactly the right size.

The FET compressor makes the sound punchy and sings at high settings; here, too, it's easy to set the right level for me. I have to adjust the output, but that's no problem, since the compressor isn't individually switchable. Switching to the Drive channel, with the same, largely neutral setting, the SansAmp immediately makes itself felt. [In the Drive channel] even with little gain, the pedal delivers a powerful and fat sound – it truly feels like a big amp. Besides the seemingly identical EQ options, Drive has a little more to offer. First, of course, is the distortion itself: The spectrum here ranges from a light hiss to copious distortion. Bite is familiar from other pedals; aggressive, twangy overtones ensure the bass can cut through even dense walls of sound. And last but not least, the mid control can be placed, as already described, before or after the amp simulation, making little difference to the sound with smaller control movements, but even more so with larger ones.

What works best for your personal taste – try it out! Depending on the sound, I sometimes ended up with pre, sometimes post. There are no losses in the bass range even at high gain, and the rather high bass control also has plenty of reserves.

The SansAmp-typical analog speaker simulation sounds as good to my ears, both through a PA and a (fairly neutral) bass system. There's no blend control, but instead, as with the dUg Ultra Bass 1000 head, there's the option to run both channels in parallel. This immediately opens up a completely equal, third layer of sound.

Using EQ, Drive, Bite, and Compressor, in combination with careful level adjustment, I'm able to create three equal sounds in a short time, all of which I can use in a rock context. The footswitches then work in such a way that with the Mix activated, I can use Clean/Drive to preselect where I end up when I turn the Mix off.

While the sounds up to this point have been in fairly normal territory, engaging the crossover in mix mode provides more extreme possibilities – and more extreme sounds. Above all, the starting point of the bass cut for the distortion has a major influence on how coarse the distortion is at higher gain settings.

A classic "Doug Pinnick tone" with a decent hole in the midrange can be achieved just as quickly as modern metal sounds à la Darkglass. If the result becomes too insubstantial, the midrange EQs or a bold twist on the LPF can help to give the clean sound more space. I really like the Doug tone with a higher LPF setting and a less extreme clean EQ. Even if the crossover is also turned off when the mix is deactivated, I usually "only" get two sounds in this mode that I can use equally well – either clean or drive is then just an add-on to perfect the mix. The effects loop can also be used to process the sound with chorus, phaser, or delay, for example, or to refine everything again with a neutral compressor before feeding it into the system.



## SUMMARY

So, is this the ultimate bass driver? In any case, the XB Driver is a very, very flexible pedal, which, especially in the studio, offers a veritable cornucopia of settings and resulting sounds spanning all decades of electric bass history and beyond. How much of this makes it to the stage depends on personal taste. I've managed to set up three equally good sounds for live performance, which I can switch between and combine as the mood takes me. For more extreme sounds, using the crossover with low-pass and high-pass filters, I usually still get two usable sounds that shine equally on both the amp and the mixer or interface.

When I consider how expensive the individual devices would be if they were still available, I'm almost inclined to say they offer a balanced price-performance ratio, even though it's still a lot of money. The quality of sound, playback, and manufacturing is certainly at the highest analog level.

## PLUS

- Sound options
- Analog sound quality
- Compressor
- Operation
- Power supply included