



GEAR

REVIEW



TONE TO CARRY-ON

The Tech 21 Fly Rig 5

Price: \$249 (list)
Info: www.tech21nyc.com

Long before the Line6 POD, the Box of Rock, or the iRig, there was the SansAmp from Tech 21 – the first tube-amp emulator. Twenty-five years into its evolution, SansAmp’s analog circuitry is now housed alongside other tone-building essentials in a super-compact, super-efficient multieffect.

The Fly Rig 5 is meant to cover you on an away gig when you don’t have your pedalboard or amp. The eponymous “5” refers to the number of functions incorporated. Following the signal path, that’s the Hot boost (up to 21 dB); Plexi distortion; SansAmp preamp; a very nice reverb; and the DLA tape-echo emulator, which includes tap tempo.

Despite being no bigger than a panini, the Fly Rig will satisfy your appetite for good tone should you find yourself saddled with a dog of an amp in a backline or rehearsal

studio. If that dark day should ever come when you have to run your electric guitar straight into a PA, the Fly Rig would be a lifesaver.

Three levels of clean/boost/distortion are selectable. The SansAmp at the heart of the Fly Rig is capable of clean tube-amp tones that are warm and realistic, with a Drive control for adding gain. The Hot boost (situated on the Plexi section, but independently controllable) is designed to sound like an extra 12AX7 gain stage and enables an assertive push. The Plexi is full-on, old-school Marshall. You’ll always want the SansAmp on, and can add one or both of the others with a soft-click step depending on how aggressive or outright sick you need your sound to be.

Applications abound for this little box, and we were pretty blown away with the

range of high-quality tones. Because the SansAmp includes speaker-cab simulation, it’s great for direct recording and holds its own against the POD, Amp Farm, and the software rigs in Garageband and Logic.

One of our favorite uses was as a preamp in front of a live amplifier. You could sneak it into the return of an effects loop to circumvent the amp’s built-in preamp, but we loved it plugged into the front. With a raunchy Plexi setting driving a clean Blues Deluxe, we birthed a Marshall/Fender mutant crossover baby that nearly brought a tear to the eye. In a good way.

The knobs and labels on the metal casing are teeny tiny – the one liability of a rig you can slip into a guitar case. But Tech 21 has done a remarkably nice job overcoming jack-of-all-trades multieffect mediocrity, and demonstrates in the Fly Rig that the company understands what guitarists need... and crave. – **Rich Maloof VG**