

# In Focus: Tech 21 30th Anniversary Bass Driver



The SansAmp is an icon, allowing bassists to do away with hefty bass amps and cabinets without sacrificing tone!

There's a handful of pieces of equipment that you'll always find on stages and in recording studios all over the world. This is for two reasons, this list of gear could probably withstand an apocalypse; they're built like tanks. Secondly, sonically and physically they also perform a cut above the rest. One bit of kit that reigns supreme on this list is the Tech 21 SansAmp Bass Driver DI.

For 30 years now, the Tech 21 Bass Driver has been the go-to, the no-brainer and a safe-bet for bass tone. Clean DI? Check. Powerful EQ and tone shaping controls? Check, check. Practical routing? You betcha—check!

To celebrate 30 years of the Tech 21 Bass Driver, Tech 21 have announced the aptly named 30th Anniversary Limited Edition model, featuring everything we've known, loved and trusted about the Bass Driver, all encased in an anodized precision-machined aluminium billet housing with all metal knobs.

The beauty of the Tech 21 Bass Driver is in its versatility, the Bass Driver is equally well-suited to extreme metal or smooth jazz, with as much or as little tube-like sound as you might need. Grit, attack and distortion are available in droves, as is weight, heft and low-end smoothness.

The first of its kind, this pedal allowed bass players to get great sound without an amp, the SansAmp (gettit?!) was born in 1994. Tech 21 was launched by B. Andrew Barta in the late 80s, and while a musician himself, he devised the circuit with the intention of selling the tech to a larger manufacturer. Surprisingly, no one had the foresight that Barta did, so after setting out on his own design and manufacturing path, his designs were quickly adopted by bass players after hearing and experiencing the new technology. It's difficult to imagine a time where the SansAmp wasn't that stalwart of music creation that it is today, but the mid-90s were just that, and this fresh, new idea ended up on the pedalboards of players everywhere.

The Bass Driver DI, as its name suggests, can be used as a DI thanks to the XLR output. This can also provide phantom power to the unit when connected to a mixing desk. The direct signal is commonly used for bass guitar, particularly when trying to keep the low end clean and clear. This is easily done with the Bass Driver DI's three outputs: the aforementioned XLR, a ¼" out as well as a parallel (unaffected) ¼" as well.

Plugging into the Bass Driver DI allows you to toggle on and off Tech 21's Tube Amplifier Emulation circuit with the single footswitch, disengaging the circuit leaves you with the Bass Driver as a "standard" active, supremely transparent direct box. However, "standard" the Bass Driver is not. The EQ options are technically three-band, however the 'Mid' is switchable between 500/1000 Hz and the 'Low' is switchable between 40/80 Hz. The addition of a 'Presence' knob shapes, shifts and refines the upper harmonic EQ curve overall.

Sonically, the sound of the Tech 21 SansAmp Bass Driver DI is difficult to describe in 2024. For a lot of players, it's just "that SansAmp sound" that is usually met with nods of understanding. The SansAmp is balanced, clear, weighty and consistent without being compressed per se, all virtues we now hold high in bass tone circles, and all thanks to the SansAmp. The 'Drive' of the SansAmp can be pushed quite hard and doesn't get overly noisy or abrasive, even when nestled into a busy mix or arrangement. Your bass tone just gets bigger, fatter and more present, a favourite of metal, punk and hardcore players. The flexibility to route signal around to three different places simultaneously makes for the best possible bass sound regardless of venue or recording situation. Take a clean split of your direct signal via the parallel output, while sending an isolated signal straight to the mixing desk, the SansAmp's main output continuing onto other pedals and your amp!

Loading into a venue with a staircase too steep for your 810 cabinet? Leave it at home and engage the Tube Amplifier Emulation on the SansAmp for as much amp-tone as you'd need anyway!

30 years of SansAmp means 30 years of balanced, consistent bass. Heck, I'm sure there's players with a SansAmp on their boards that haven't missed a gig for close to 30 years, and the little pedal, with its enclosure built to withstand the rigours of the road, will last at least 30 more. 30 years is a tremendous occasion, especially when thinking about all the pedals that've come and gone, and so the 30th Anniversary Limited Edition, with its clean-cut good looks, honours a pedal that should be celebrated like the SansAmp Bass Driver DI should be.

The SansAmp changed the game in the 90s, and while innovation comes and goes, it's a product that has been left largely untouched. B. Andrew Barta really did get it right, and he should have; he was a musician himself, and he knew the needs of bass players, both physically from lugging heavy amplifiers around, but sonically with great tone and routing options for different rigs.

The SansAmp is a pedal that we all need in our arsenal, and if you don't have one yet, there's no better time than now with the Tech 21 Bass Driver 30th Anniversary Limited Edition SansAmp.

WORDS BY LEWIS NOKE EDWARDS

