

Tech 21 SansAmp VT Bass DI Review



Tech 21's SansAmp has become a go-to piece of gear for many bassists and engineers, both onstage and in the studio. The black and yellow box has long been praised for its tube-emulation capabilities, as well as other performance-friendly functions. Recently, the mad scientists in the Tech 21 labs have been tinkering with their toys by splicing the DNA of their previous products. The new VT Bass DI was born from this experimentation and is a multi-functional tool that aims to please players with tube-emulating familiarity, and new and thoughtful features.

Emulator Deluxe

It's pretty clear at first glance that the VT Bass DI is packed with options. If you're familiar with the SansAmp—or any of Tech 21's Character series pedals—you should feel right at home. For newbies, a quick tour might be helpful.

The level dial adjusts the overall output, with the neighboring blend control providing a balance between the direct signal and tube-emulation circuitry. The triangularly arranged EQ controls are positioned for quick adjustments, and the personality of the pedal is located within the character and drive knobs.

A quintet of switches provides additional tone shaping and the means to alleviate potential output issues. Phantom power can be used when depressing its assigned switch, and subsequent switches include one that can boost the 1/4" output by 10 dB and a -20 dB button that lowers the output of the XLR.

Depressing the speaker simulation switch shapes the tone in a way that conveys a mic'd speaker sound if you're running the VT Bass DI straight to the board. For additional presence with a subsonic filter, the bite button could come in handy. Add to that a parallel output and an easy-access battery compartment, and you have a box that boasts an impressive array of tools.

I Want My SVT!

The VT Bass DI might pride itself on Ampeg-style shape shifting, but there are far more layers to this onion. As previously touched on, unless you are completely familiar to Tech 21's family of pedals, I wouldn't recommend taking the pedal straight from the store to a gig. A little experimentation in your laboratory will reward you with a very useful spectrum of sounds.

On a rock gig, the VT Bass DI turned a Nash P-style bass into a doom-friendly drone machine when I used the SVT-style sample setting found in the manual. The bite button also benefitted the bass sound, providing just enough presence to convey a clang-y edge to the tone. While it didn't deliver the plushy tube touch, the sound was convincing.

I plugged an NS Design NXT electric upright into the VT Bass DI at a salsa show, engaged the -20 dB and speaker simulator switches, and ran the signal straight to the board with no bass rig. I dialed in the flip-top-style settings and the heft and punch of the electric upright's notes filled the room, as if I was playing through a B-15 on steroids. Thanks to a robust sound system, I was able to go rig-free the entire night.

The Verdict

Tech 21 has constructed a pedal with practical features, a logical layout, and solid construction. It may not convert the tube aficionado or someone who prefers more simplicity in their sound crafting, but spending some time with the VT Bass DI can be a rewarding experience. If you're hungry for a go-to pedal for a host of situations, the VT Bass DI might satisfy your tonal appetite.

Ratings

Pros:

A solid pedal packed with practical features.

Cons:

Mild learning curve. Might not totally please die-hard Ampeg disciples.

Tones:



Ease of Use:



Build/Design:



Value:

