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Purchasing Bagpipes, A Must Read Guide

Plastic vs. African Blackwood

Plastic/Polypenco

Pros:

- Ease of Maintenance (no oiling necessary)
- Lower cost (\$625 as opposed to \$1349)
- Does not crack from moisture
- Better performance in tough conditions (i.e. Afghanistan)
- Durable (can take more abuse like bumping)
- Some sets include a 10 year warranty (McCallum)
- Many different mount options

Cons:

- Moisture build-up if you are a wet blower. It doesn't absorb any condensation like wood
- Not as traditional looking

Wood:

Pros:

- Produce a richer tone (but many new pipers won't hear the difference)
- More traditional look and feel
- Many different mount options
- Most sets include a 2 year warranty

Cons:

- Maintenance is required with wood pipes (oiling the bores and the outside, drying the pipes before they are put away)
- Wood can crack due to changes in moisture
- It swells and shrinks from moisture and temperature changes which can effect performance (i.e. a hot and/or humid day)

Things to remember:

- It is the setup of the reeds and the player, not the material of the pipes, which primarily influence the sound of the pipes.
- Many people can't tell the difference between plastic and wood from the same maker until they get up close to them.

- Plastic has been used for many woodwind instruments over the years and it has proven to be the top choice because of durability and the ability for the instrument to last many, many years.

Buy New or Used Pipes?

New

Pros:

- Come with a warranty
- Quality & consistency of manufacture is assured.

Cons:

- They may not have acclimatized and may crack. (Warranty DOES cover this cracking).

Used

Pros:

- If you are buying locally, like from within your band, you know the pipes are well maintained.

Cons:

- No warranty
- May need repairs or restoration
- Unknown maintenance history
- Manufacturer may be unknown
- Some parts may not be original
- Difficult to determine fair price

One of the most common sources for cheaper bagpipes is eBay. Keep in mind that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. There are countless stories of people purchasing pipes through auction sites only to receive an inferior product. There are many sets of Pakistani pipes listed on eBay. These pipes are often made of inferior local rosewood - not African Blackwood. There may also be pipes listed as "blackwood" but may actually be another wood that has been stained black. Pipes from Pakistan are often poor quality. They may require hundreds of dollars of additional parts and repair to get them playable and you still have an inferior instrument. Sometimes, the listing picture will show a maker's stamp. While this can be a sign of a quality set, one should inquire further. A stamp on the chanter does not mean that the whole set is from that maker. Ask for close up images of the full set to ensure that the set is matched and of good quality. Even on a good quality set, be aware that parts may have been replaced or repaired over time and may not be in good condition. Ask for this information before purchasing. It's not just Pakistani pipes that are questionable. There are false claims from individuals misrepresenting quality pipe makers as well.

Budget

Know what you are willing to spend. Prices will vary due to maker, material, and ornamentation.

- Entry level Blackwood sets start at \$1349 for the *sticks only* with plain nickel ferrules and imitation ivory mounts. This does not include bag, reeds, bag cover, or cords. Top end models can cost upwards of \$12,000 with real silver and mammoth ivory.
- Entry level plastic sets start at \$625 for the *sticks only*. This does not include bag, reeds, bag cover, or cords. Top end models are \$900 with imitation ivory and engraved nickel ferrules.
- Be sure that you are comparing the same options when comparing prices. It may be difficult to compare the same bag, reed, case options. These additions are about \$700. Kinnaird Bagpipes offers a price guarantee.

Look at other pipes in your band or at Highland Games to find a style or sound that appeals to you.

Bagpipes generally come as a set of sticks only, typically including:

- the blowpipe
- the chanter
- one bass, and two tenor drones (7 pieces)
- five stocks (to attach the 3 drones, blowpipe, and chanter to the pipe bag)

Brands we stock: McCallum (Blackwood and plastic), Dunbar (Blackwood and plastic), Wallace, Kron, Naill, Walsh (Blackwood and small pipes), and Morrison Reel (small pipes).

Types of mounts and engravings

Our most popular set of pipes is the McCallum AB4 Bagpipe. Here are some of the options available for this model:

- Blackwood with Nickel engraved mounts



- Imitation Horn with Gold engraved mounts



- Imitation Ivory with Nickel engraved mounts



- Mopani (wood) with Gold Engraved mounts



- Full Nickel engraved



Engravings Patterns Available:



Celtic



Thistle



Victorian Scroll



Zoomorphic

Other Considerations:

- Delivery timeframe- some manufacturer's delivery is over a year. Manufacturers we stock typically offer delivery within 3 months. Delivery time may be longer at Christmas.
- Weight- full silver is heavy, a consideration for youth players and those of smaller stature.
- Brand – Re-sale may be better with well known brands such as McCallum.
- Blowpipe Adjustment – All new pipes come with a long blowpipe so that it can be custom shortened to match the player. Not all dealers offer this service or can do it in-house. At Kinnaird Bagpipes, blowpipe adjustment is included with each new set of bagpipes.

To guarantee a quality instrument, shop with a reputable dealer. Most dealers will have knowledge of used pipes and carry reputable brands. There are reputable pipe makers in Scotland, the UK, Canada, USA, and other parts of the world. McCallum, Naill, Kron, Walsh, Wallace, and Dunbar are quality pipe makers whose instruments are available at Kinnaird Bagpipes. Each has a full line of pipes to meet any budget from basic sets to full engraved silver sets. Rob Kinnaird, Professional Engineer, offers bagpipe repair and restoration. Check out www.KinnairdBagpipes.com for a quote on a set of bagpipes today!