Michael Davidson’s Recommendations for Large Bore Tenor (F-Attachment) Trombones

Disclaimer - I’m not under contract with any of these instrument manufacturers. I play a Greenhoe Custom or a Greenhoe Optimized Bach 42B for my tenor work, and a Courtois 131R alto trombone. I think Greenhoe trombones are the best instruments for me, but they’re not being made anymore. If you can find a good used Greenhoe, consider it. If not, here are some possible recommendations for you.

• **Bach 42BO.** This is an open-wrap F-attachment horn. I’d get the extra light slide, which I believe is a bit more durable, and, if possible, a gold brass bell. The Bach 42B was and is “the gold standard.” Read more here: [http://www.conn-selmer.com/en-us/our-instruments.band-instruments/trombones/42bo/](http://www.conn-selmer.com/en-us/our-instruments.band-instruments/trombones/42bo/)

• **Yamaha 882OR.** The “R” in the model number is important here – this is the instrument designed by Larry Zalkind, professor at Eastman, and former principal trombonist of the Utah Symphony. It is, in my opinion, the best horn available today that is not made by a custom instrument company. Ko-Ichiro Yamamoto (principal trombone, Seattle Symphony) and David Finlayson (New York Philharmonic) also play these instruments. Read more here: [http://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical-instruments/winds/trombones/tenorbasstrombones/ysl-882or/?mode=model](http://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical-instruments/winds/trombones/tenorbasstrombones/ysl-882or/?mode=model)

• **Courtois AC 420BOR: This is an open wrap F-attachment trombone similar to a Bach 42BO in my opinion. Courtois makes fine instruments. Indeed, I personally feel that the Courtois alto trombone is the best alto trombone made today – it SOUNDS like an alto should sound. The 420 comes in a variety of valve possibilities (rotary, Hagmann, Thayer). Read more about Courtois here:** [http://www.courtois-paris.com/en](http://www.courtois-paris.com/en)

• **Brass Ark/Sawday vintage Bach 42 trombone restoration/upgrades.** This is what it sounds like – they take old Bach 42Bs and retool them, add new valves, open wrap the F-attachment tubes, and give you leadpipe options. You can read about them at: [http://brassark.com/arkupdatedtrombones.html](http://brassark.com/arkupdatedtrombones.html)

• **S. E. Shires** trombones. Steve Shires is a master craftsman. Make sure you get a horn made in the USA. You’ll pay more, but it’s worth it, in my opinion. These are modular instruments that give you many bell/slide/valve combination possibilities. Read more here: [http://seshires.com/trombones/large_bore_medium_bore/large_medium_bore_tenor_trombones.html](http://seshires.com/trombones/large_bore_medium_bore/large_medium_bore_tenor_trombones.html)

• **Michael Rath** trombones. See above, although Michael Rath makes his horns in the UK. He has a line of non-modular instruments (OO line), of which the 400 is the tenor trombone. These OO instruments are made in China, FYI. Read about Rath trombones here: [http://rathtrombones.com/instruments/instruments.htm](http://rathtrombones.com/instruments/instruments.htm)
• **Brass Ark “Vintage Orchestral” model trombone.** Also from the Brass Ark and Noah Gladstone, these look like very interesting instruments. They feature a wide hand slide (42B width), an open wrap with an oversized rotor like the ones first designed by master L.A. brass craftsman Larry Minick in the 1970s (I think) and later seen on some Yamaha trombones in the 1990s, and a thin bell. Read more about this instrument here: [http://brassark.com/brassarktrombone.html](http://brassark.com/brassarktrombone.html)

• **Edwards Trombones:** These are made in Elkhorn, WI, and the parent company is Getzen. They are essentially modular designed instruments, with lots of valve/slide/tuning slide combinations, unless you buy the Edwards Alessi model trombone (T396A). Read more about Edwards trombones here: [www.edwards-instruments.com](http://www.edwards-instruments.com)

Valve advice: Try them out! I have students that have played on Hagmann, Thayer (AKA Axial Flow), regular, and oversized rotary valves. It all depends on preference, and how much resistance you want. Generally, in my opinion the Thayer valves seem to offer the least resistance, followed by the Hagmann, oversized rotor, and regular sized rotor. Hagmann and rotary valves seem to require less maintenance than Thayer valves, in my opinion. Try them out. See what you like.

**Recommendations for Bass Trombones**

• **Bach 50B30G.** The biggest thing to watch for in bass trombones, in my opinion, is to make sure you don’t go larger than a 9.5 inch bell. Anything bigger is too large a bell, in my opinion. This has an option for a 10.5 inch bell – the 50B3L. Stay away!!!

• **Getzen Custom 3062AFR.** This horn features dual Thayer valves, open wrap, and a dual bore slide as standard. I’m not a fan of the dual bore slide. That said, this is a great horn at a great price. If you want a little less expensive instrument with traditional rotary valves, check out the **Getzen 1052FDR.** Read more about Getzen horns here: [http://www.getzen.com/](http://www.getzen.com/)

• **Courtois AC502B.** This instrument is a more affordably priced bass trombone from a well-respected instrument maker. Courtois makes a full line of trombones; they are the choice of the best trombonists in the world, including the section of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Read more here: [http://www.courtois-paris.com/en](http://www.courtois-paris.com/en)

It’s important to have good, reliable equipment (horn, MP, etc.). While these will help you improve (and, if you have only a beginning model trombone, they are necessary for improvement) you will make improvement (change) permanent only when your concept of sound (and/or technique, breathing, etc.) changes. For that, you’ll need an open mind, great examples, a good recording device, and a good private lesson teacher. Good luck!!
**Mute Recommendations:**

You need a **straight** and a **cup** mute for high school playing. For college and beyond you’ll need a **harmon** (AKA “Wah-Wah”), **bucket**, and perhaps different types of **straight** mutes that include different metals/wood.

My basic mute suggestion is to buy a Denis Wick cup mute, as I think this is the best one on the market. You can buy a Denis Wick metal straight mute, or get fancier with Jo-Ral mutes (brass, or copper bottom). I’d go with Jo-Ral bucket and harmon mutes, but that’s just my opinion. Again, my opinion, stay away from Humes and Berg fiber mutes, as I think they play really stuffy. If you want a good fiber mute, Denis Wick makes one for about $20.00 that plays really well. Other good mute makers out there include, but are not limited to, Tom Crown; Wallace; Best Brass; TrumCor. Humes and Berg make a Solo-tone mute that is pretty good, so if you need one of these, by all means get one. A **practice mute** is helpful as long as you don’t use it all the time!! It’s for pros to play when they’re stuck in a hotel room, or for warming up back stage. Best Brass, Dillon, and Faxx make fine practice mutes that “nest” in the bell. **All of these can be purchased at Hickey’s Music, www.hickeys.com, and most likely at your local dealer.**

**Mouthpiece Recommendations:**

**Large Bore Tenor Mouthpieces:** Bach 6.5 AL, or 5G; Schilke 51 (NOT 51D – this is a euphonium mouthpiece!) or 52; Griego 5; Denis Wick 5BS, 6AL, 6BL. Gold plating feels better and may be necessary if a student is allergic to silver plate.

**Bass Trombone Mouthpieces:** Bach 2G, Bach 1.5G; Schilke 58, 59; Griego 2. Be careful not to get too large too soon – the bass trombone plays in the tenor range a lot...

**Trombone Cleaning Necessities:**

- Nylon Mouthpiece Brush (use every day after practice) – I’d get a mouthpiece pouch, too, to put you MP in and avoid damage to the rim, shank, etc.
- Cleaning rod and cheesecloth (for slide)
- Modern Trombone Snake - HW Products Brass Saver UBSTB – cost is $16.95 – will safely clean all of interior of your horn, including slide crook and rotor – no metal parts! It is made of plastic, and has a swab on one end of the snake. Recommended.
- Put horn in bathtub with lukewarm soapy water – disassemble horn, clean, put back together (don’t pop the rotary valve out !!!). Then reassemble, lubricate! Use Hetman synthetic lubricants (I recommend #8 for the tuning slides, #11 for the F-attachment rotor, #14 for the bearing, #15 for the ball joints in the trigger linkage, and Yamaha Trombone Slide Lubricant (this is different than Yamaha Trombone Slide Cream, and similar to Slide-O-Mix, but much better, in my opinion) - **REPEAT THIS EVERY 2 WEEKS!**
Maintenance Suggestion:

• Have a repair technician professionally clean and “PC” your horn twice a year. This should include getting the slide aligned.