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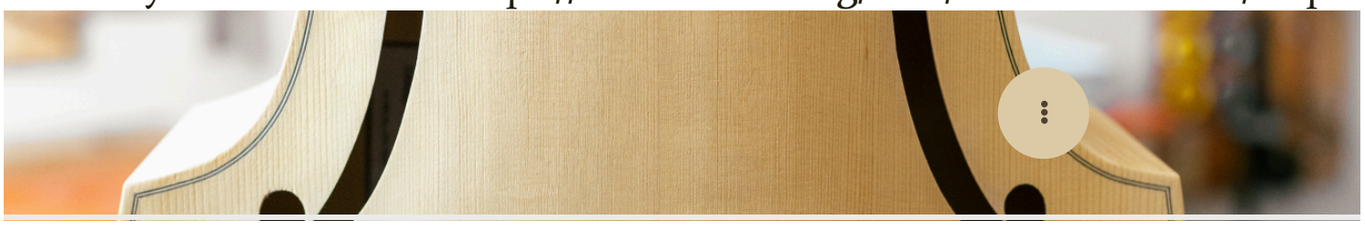



Best Yamaha Trombones Brand Guide

Trombone / By Kenaz Filan

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Kenaz Filan

Kenaz is a writer, author, and musician. His first instrument was the clarinet, but he's a lover of all woodwinds. His favorite method of musical expression is singing. His music collection ranges from contemporary to classical and jazz. He loves a little bit of everything, even progressive rock. While a bit out of the box, Kenaz credits Emerson, Lake & Palmer as the catalyst for his interest in classical music.

In 1887 Torakusa Yamaha opened the Nikkon Gakki (Japan Musical Instrument) Company to sell his reed organs. Today, his company, Yamaha Instruments, is one of the world's largest and most highly-

regarded instrument makers. Yamaha makes instruments for performers at every level and is one of the few companies highly regarded for both their student and professional lines.

Yamaha trombones are no exceptions. You can find Yamaha instruments in jazz clubs, conservatories, orchestras, and student programs worldwide. Musicians of all genres praise Yamaha trombones for their durability, reliability, and excellent tone. Yamaha's excellent quality control and customer service, you can buy a Yamaha trombone knowing that Yamaha stands behind its instruments if delivery or build issues arise.

Bottom Line Up Front: For jazz musicians, the YSL-891Z is the best Yamaha trombone for their needs, while musicians who play more symphonic or orchestral music will find Yamaha's YSL-882O Xeno trombone a better fit. But all of the Yamaha trombones on this list are excellent instruments that will serve trombone players at every musical level.

How I Chose the Best Yamaha Trombone Options

From their student trombones to their custom professional lines, Yamaha trombones are reliable, comfortable, and playable. On the one hand, this made my job easy. Whatever Yamaha trombone I recommend, I am sure that you will receive a very good instrument that plays well and sounds great. I am equally sure that Yamaha will take care of any issues you might find with your new trombone.

Yamaha sorts its instruments by Student, Intermediate, Professional, and Custom lines. An untrained eye might have trouble distinguishing between a Yamaha Student and Yamaha Custom trombone. Yamaha's Student and Intermediate lines often have features that were found on last season's Professional instruments, and Custom innovations trickle down to the Professional lines. A skilled trombonist could make sweet music with any Yamaha trombone.

Yamaha instruments are not inexpensive, but they are very reasonably priced for what you get. A Yamaha instrument will serve you through a lifetime. Should you have an issue, you will have no issue finding a repair person familiar with Yamaha trombones. And Yamaha trombones hold their value well on the used market should you decide to upgrade your bone or switch to glockenspiel or piccolo.

Best Student Trombone: YSL-354

You may feel a bit of sticker shock when you look at a YSL-354's price tag. You can find "student trombones" on Amazon and elsewhere for under $150, but you'll pay nearly ten times that much for a YSL-354! But those bargain-basement trombones typically have bad intonation, poorly fitted slides, air leaks, and other issues that will make them

nearly impossible to play. If a professional trombonist can't get a decent sound out of an instrument, you can hardly be surprised if a beginner throws the trombone down in frustration.

The YSL-354 is one of the world's most popular student trombones because it has none of these issues. Yamaha sends its trombones to market with proper intonation and fittings. Your student will soon learn that diligent practice results in great sound, making rehearsal a joy rather than a chore. And because college and professional bands frequently use YSL-354s for their trombone section, you can be assured your new instrument will stand up to anything your student throws in its direction.

The YSL-354 is not cheap, but I strongly recommend that you consider getting one for your student. YSL-354s are frequently available as rentals at local music shops, and many will let you apply some or all of the rental costs to a purchase should your student express serious interest.

Pros

- Ergonomic design makes it comfortable to hold during rehearsals
- Arguably the best-sounding entry-level trombone on the market
- Ruggedly built to withstand the rigors of clumsy young students

Cons

- Tightly fitted slide requires regular oiling to keep the action easy

Specs

- **Key:** B ♭
- **Bell Material:** Yellow brass
- **Bell Diameter:** 204.4mm 8”
- **Bore Size:** 12.7mm (0.5″)
- **Outer Slide Material:** Yellow brass
- **Inner Slide Material:** Nickel Silver
- **Finish:** Gold lacquer (also available in silver-plated)
- **Mouthpiece:** SL-48S
- **Case:** Included

Best Intermediate Trombone: YSL-448G

Yamaha’s YSL-448G introduces intermediate trombonists to the F attachment. When the valve is opened, an F attachment takes the trombone’s pitch down a fifth. This can be very useful for playing low

notes, although some trombonists claim that the F attachment makes the trombone sound more congested. (Jazz players, who spend much of their time in the trombone's higher registers, rarely use F attachment trombones).

The F attachment will definitely make hitting the lower register more comfortable, and the added resistance can improve your embouchure and breathing technique. If you hope to play in symphony orchestras, or if you are interested in playing bass or contrabass trombone, you will need to master trombones with lower register attachments. The YSL-448G will be a great choice for a young trombonist who is ready to move on to more serious study.

The YSL-448G has a wider bore that will require more lung power than the YSL-354, and getting the hang of the F attachment may take some time. But once you master the YSL-448G, you'll be ready for wherever your trombone career might take you. Like all Yamaha's Intermediate instruments, the YSL-448G has many features you associate with professional trombones and may well serve you throughout your trombone career.

Pros

- Handslide ergonomically designed to prevent hand cramping and soreness
- Semi-open wrap makes the 448G less bulky and awkward than many F attachment trombones
- Rose brass bell brightens the otherwise dark symphonic tone

Cons

- String linkage on the F attachment rotor valve can be fragile and break at inconvenient times.

Specs

- **Key:** B ♭ /F
- **Bell Material:** Rose brass
- **Bell Diameter:** 215.9 mm 8.5”
- **Bore Size:** 13.9mm (0.547″)
- **Outer Slide Material:** Yellow brass
- **Inner Slide Material:** Chrome-plated nickel silver
- **Finish:** Lacquered
- **Wrap:** Semi-open
- Slide lock

Best Jazz Trombone: YSL-891Z

Yamaha employed professional jazz trombonists Wycliffe Gordon and Andy Martin as consultants when they designed the 891Z. As professionals, Gordon and Martin know how much instrument weight matters when you’re on the stage or in the studio. The YSL-891Z is

lighter than most trombones, and Yamaha's long experience in making ergonomically-friendly trombones means it is balanced for comfort.

Most trombones come with the leadpipes soldered in place. The YSL-891Z comes with two interchangeable leadpipes. The NY leadpipe (developed with Wycliffe Gordon) is shorter and broader for a more open sound. Andy Martin's LA leadpipe is longer and has a tapered bore that provides more feedback pressure. You choose the leadpipe that works for you or switch them for different genres. Since the leadpipe connects your mouthpiece to your instrument, tiny changes can make a big difference.

Whether you're playing smooth jazz, bebop, big band, or chamber jazz, the 891Z will give you the sound that you want. Jazz is all about going with the changes, and wherever your music career takes you, the YSL-891Z will be up for the task. From bar mitzvahs to avant-garde nights at the coffee shop, you can count on the YSL-891Z.

Pros

- Lighter weight will be appreciated during lengthy solos and long rehearsals
- Designed in consultation with working jazz trombonists
- Interchangeable leadpipes let you tune your trombone's sound and feel to your preferences

Cons

- Expensive

Specs

- **Key:** B ♭
- **Bell Material:** Yellow Brass; One-piece; Hand Hammered
- **Bell Diameter:** 204.4mm (8″)
- **Shank:** Medium
- **Leadpipe:** Two interchangeable: NY (longer) and LA (shorter)
- **Body Material:** Yellow Brass
- **Weight:** Light
- **Bore Size:** 12.9 mm (0.508”)
- **Outer Slide Material:** Yellow brass; Drawn
- **Inner Slide Material:** Chrome-plated nickel silver; Drawn
- **Finish:** Clear Epoxy Lacquer
- Mouthpiece: 45C2

Best Mariachi Trombone: YSL-345VC Valve Trombone in C

While most trombones you find in North America and western Europe use slides, valve trombones are popular in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Many mariachi bands favor the C trombone over the more common trombone in B ♭ . (Yamaha sells their B ♭ valve trombone as the YSL-345V). The YSL-345VC has the trademark clean, bright

Yamaha sound that will cut through the noise on solos and provide proper support on the low end.

Many slide trombonists complain that valve trombones feel and sound stuffy. The YSL-345VC's .500″ bore is larger than most valve trombones, which gives it a more free-blowing feel and better tone. While Yamaha classifies its valve trombones as student instruments, they punch well above their weight and can easily rise to the challenge of professional recording and performance work. Like other instruments in Yamaha's student lines, the YSL-345VC is built to handle rough treatment and touring.

If you are a trumpet player who wants to add a trombone to your collection, the YSL-345V in B ♭ will be a great addition to your collection. The fingerings on the YSL-345V are identical to those used on a trumpet, although the valve trombone plays an octave lower. Valve trombones are also popular in jazz, with Bob Brookmeyer and Juan Tizol among the most famous jazz valve trombonists.

Pros

- Wider bore ensures free blowing and easy action
- Precisely machined piston valves allow for quick changes in difficult passages
- Rich and complex tone suited for multiple musical genres

Cons

- Valve trombones less popular than slide trombones in North America

Specs

- **Key:** C (345V in B ♭)
- **Bell Diameter:** 204.4mm 8”
- **Bore Size:** 12.7mm (0.5″)
- **Mouthpiece:** SL48-S
- **Mouthpipe:** Gold brass
- **Finish:** Gold lacquer
- **Valves:** Piston, nickel-plated

Best Symphonic Trombone: YHR-882O Xeno

Yamaha’s Xeno line features heavier-gauge brass and a thick-walled, one-piece, hand-hammered bell that gives the YHR-882O Xeno a big, bold, symphonic sound full of rich tonal colors. But while the 882O can give you powerful fortissimos, it also retains its velvety tone even in the softest passages. Yamaha’s 882O was designed in consultation with trombonist Peter Sullivan of the Pittsburgh Symphony. The Xeno 882O’s 8 2/3″ bell (larger than the standard 8 1/2″) gives the horn a brighter sound and superb projection.

Because professional musicians have strong preferences in their instruments, Yamaha also offers a YHR-882OR trombone designed

with Larry Zalkind of the Utah Symphony. The YHR-882OR has a wider slide than the 882O, and the F/B ♭ slide positions are reversed. This gives the 882OR a darker, more theatrical and atmospheric sound with more bell overtones. If you favor the *stürm und drang* sound, the 882OR might be perfect for you. Other options include a gold brass vs. a mellower yellow brass bell

Some orchestral musicians complain that Yamaha's house sound has a generic "middle of the road" quality that is neither especially dark nor bright. Others praise its accuracy and its flexibility. You can use a YHR-882O (or OR) for anything from chamber music to Wagner and sound great!

Pros

- Very playable horn that slots notes nicely
- Designed in consultation with working symphonic musicians
- Choice of slide position wraps

Cons

- Expensive

Specs

- **Key:** B ♭ /F
- **Bell Material:** Yellow Brass; One-piece; Hand Hammered. (Also available in Gold Brass)
- **Bell Diameter:** 220 mm (8 2/3″)
- **Bore Size:** 13.89 mm (0.547″)
- **Outer Slide Material:** Yellow brass; Drawn

- **Inner Slide Material:** Chrome-plated nickel silver; Drawn
- **Finish:** Clear Epoxy Lacquer
- **Mouthpiece:** SL-51C4L

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Question: Is the Trombone a Transposing Instrument?

Answer: If you are playing in a British brass band, music for trombone is written in treble clef and sounds a full ninth lower than the written note. In most other situations, music for trombone is written in bass clef at concert pitch. A trumpeter playing a C from the score actually plays a B ♭ , one step lower than the written note. A trombonist playing a C from the score is playing the C as written.

Question: Is the Trombone Hard to Learn?

Answer: With a trombone, the pitch is controlled by a slide rather than valves. The slide allows for intermediate tones and the glissandos we associate with the trombone sound. But this also means a trombonist must have a good sense of placement and an excellent ear for pitch to avoid sour notes. The trombone can be difficult to play for students with shorter arms, as the lowest notes require a long reach. And because the trombone is large, heavy, and requires vigorous arm movements, it also requires a certain degree of upper body strength.

Question: How Do Trombones Most Frequently Get Damaged?

Answer: Trombones are long and awkward, which means accidents frequently happen. Dents to the trombone bell are mostly cosmetic and will do no harm to the sound. Damage to the slide is much more serious. If your slide is sticking intermittently, give your instrument a

thorough cleaning and oil the slide. Often sticking is caused by dirt or grime. If your slide still sticks, it is probably bent and will require professional servicing. And do **not** try removing stuck mouthpieces with pliers, as that frequently results in damage both to the mouthpiece and mouthpipe.

Conclusion

While Yamaha trombones are solid instruments at every performance level, each model is best suited to different needs.

If you are a beginning trombonist, **a student trombone like the Yamaha YSL-354 will stand up to long hours of practice and help you develop your technique**.

For a more experienced performer looking to step up to a more advanced instrument, **Yamaha's YSL-448G will be an excellent introduction to the F attachment and a solid second instrument throughout your career.**

If you are a trumpet player, or if you play traditional Latin American music, you should check out Yamaha's YSL-345V and 345VC valve trombones. While valve trombones are uncommon in North America, many jazz and Latin musicians are rediscovering them today.

Yamaha's best jazz trombone is the YSL-891Z, while **symphonic and orchestral musicians will love the Yamaha YHR-882O**. But ultimately the best Yamaha trombone is the one that feels best to you and that lets you play your best. Whatever model you choose, you won't go wrong with a Yamaha instrument. Happy playing!

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- Trombone Brands to Avoid
- Best Trombones on Amazon
- How to Find the Best Valve Trombone: 5 Of My All-Time Favorite Valve Trombones

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