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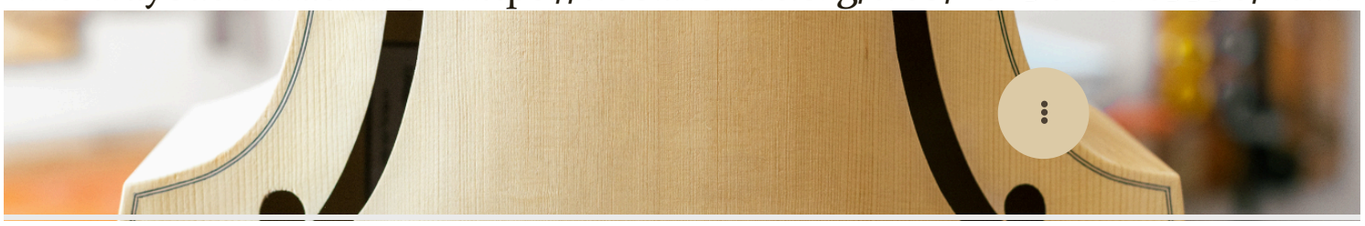

Best French Horn on Amazon Guide

Horn / 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.

French horns generally aren't the sort of instrument you can pinch pennies on. The French horn's design is notoriously complex and even the best French horn is among the most challenging of all instruments

to play well. You might, after taking a look at Amazon's many cheap instruments of dubious playability, think that the giant retailer is a bad place to shop for a French horn. But Amazon actually offers a number of high-quality professional and serious student French horns amidst its flood of shoddy imports.

If you're in the market for a French horn but haven't known where to begin, read on. The French horn of your dreams may be on Amazon as you speak, and I'm going to help you find it!

Bottom Line Up Front: Amazon sells the Conn 8D CONNstellation, one of the world's leading French horns. Those whose budget and playing skills are not up to Conn 8D levels can find less expensive instruments on Amazon. But with French horns, as with everything else, you get what you pay for. You can get an adequate French horn for less, but a horn fit for serious players is going to set you back several thousand dollars.

How I Chose the Best French Horns on Amazon

A few of the things I look for when ranking instruments include:

Ability

A beginning French Horn player will do best mastering the basics on a simple single horn. A more advanced horn player may benefit from a double or even a triple horn. More advanced horns can be more complicated to play and require better breathing technique, but will give skilled players the extra range required for many orchestral passages. Instead of spending money on a horn that is over the

student's pay grade, I recommend buying a solid student horn for beginners and using the extra money for lessons with a good teacher.

Use

Are you going to be using your French horn as a student or professional instrument? Are you going to be performing on a stage or a marching field? Will this be your primary instrument or a horn you use for one or two numbers during your act? Are you an amateur who plays for the joy of the music, or a professional who earns your living with your French horn?

Price

A cheap but unplayable French horn is a waste of time and money. A horn that costs just a little bit more may be an investment in a lifetime of French horn playing. If you're a serious French horn player, you don't mind spending a little extra on your primary instrument. But I want to make sure you get your money's worth and find a French horn that suits both your needs and your budget.

Brand Name

Resellers come and go on Amazon. If you have trouble with your instrument, you may have difficulty contacting customer service or getting a refund. I looked for French horns made by companies with a known track record. Instrument makers have built a reputation have a vested interest in maintaining quality control and customer satisfaction. Resellers who get too many complaints can simply open another shop and restart the process anew.

The Best French Horns on Amazon

Best Inexpensive French Horn: Mendini MFH-20

Mendini is a subsidiary of Cecilio, a Chinese/US firm that has become a major player in American student instruments. Mendini has gained a reputation for punching above its price point and producing decent instruments at extremely reasonable prices. (You can buy over twenty MFH-20s for the price you'd pay for a Conn Vintage 8D!) The MFH-20 is a solid French horn that will work as a beginner's instrument and also serve well as a backup or rehearsal horn.

The MFH-20 is a beginner's horn with a narrower .450″ bore that will make it easier for young people to master proper breathing, a smaller 12″ bell, and three rotary valves. It is a single horn in F, which will be easier for novices than a double horn. The MFH-20 comes with a carrying case, a mouthpiece, and a pair of white gloves and polishing cloth to ensure the lacquered brass stays bright and shiny.

This is a basic instrument and serious French horn players will likely find its lack of features limiting. But they will still be able to get great

sound out of the MFH-20, and beginners will be able to concentrate on their lessons without worrying that their playing suffers from their French horn's shoddy construction.

Pros

- Comes with everything you need to start playing French horn
- One year warranty against defects
- An inexpensive introduction to the French horn

Cons

- A starter instrument that serious French horn players may quickly outgrow

Specs

- Key of F
- Lacquered yellow brass bell and body
- .450″ bore
- 12″ bell
- 3 solid rotors with mechanical linkage

Best Step-Up French Horn: Jupiter JHR700

Jupiter JHR700

Taiwanese instrument manufacturer Jupiter got its start selling student instruments, but also has several higher-end lines that are well suited to more advanced and even professional musicians. While Jupiter's JHR700 French horn costs several times more than the Mendini, its easy-blowing action and warm sound compare favorably with even more expensive French horns.

The Mendini will get a student through the first year or two of French horn practice. The JHR700 will get you up to high school and will serve well as a second horn long after you have moved on to a more advanced instrument. Its tapered rotary valves give you an open, spacious sound with fast action on difficult passages. And the rose

brass leadpipe not only warms and thickens the sound, it is more resistant to the devastating corrosion known as “red rot.”

The JHR700 has a consistent tone throughout its registers and solid projection for orchestral accompaniment and solos. Jupiter’s reputation for solid quality control and customer service means you can feel safe about a big online purchase. If you are serious about learning French horn, the JHR700 will be an excellent investment.

Pros

- A solid intermediate French horn for under $2,000
- Great choice for serious students
- Comes with mouthpiece and case

Cons

- May not hold resale value as well as some of the other horns on our list

Specs

- Key of F
- Lacquered Brass Body
- 11.9″ Bell
- Mechanical-Link Tapered Rotary Valves
- .472″ Bore
- Nickel-Sleeved Outer Tuning Slides
- Jupiter mouthpiece
- ABS Case with Aluminum Frame

Best Intermediate French Horn: Holton H378

Although today it primarily sells student instruments, Holton was once a highly-regarded maker of professional brass. Between 1958 and 1992 Holton's French horns were designed in collaboration with the late Philip Farkas, former principal horn of the Chicago Symphony and author of ***The Art of Horn Playing***. While the H378 is sold as an

intermediate French horn, it has a beautiful tone and a fine legato that will leave you sounding like a seasoned professional.

While the Mendini and Jupiter horns are single horns, the Holton H378 is a double horn with a B ♭ valve that raises the horn's pitch by a fifth and improves accuracy in the higher ranges. The yellow brass body brightens the sound, making the H378 a great choice for solo work or jazz performance.

At nearly $4,000 the H378 is a substantial purchase. But it is a purchase that will last a serious French horn player a lifetime. Holton does not receive as much attention as other French horn makers and many players dismiss Horton as an instrument maker that has seen better days. In the hands of a skilled hornist, the H378 will prove that Holton isn't ready to be counted out just yet.

Pros

- Designed in collaboration with one of the world's leading French horn players and educators
- Bright, sparkling tone that will stand out in an ensemble or solo performance
- Will be the last instrument most French horn players will ever need

Cons

- Heavier and more complicated than a single horn

Specs

- Key of F/B ♭
- .468″ bore
- Farkas wrap
- 12-1/4″ medium throat yellow brass bell
- Yellow brass branches and slide crooks
- Nickel silver slide tubes
- Holton-Farkas MC mouthpiece
- CH602 plastic shell case.

Best Marching French Horn: Yamaha YHR-302M

Yamaha YHR-302M

While French horns are good for many things, they're not really designed for marching. Not only are they heavy and bulky, but the bell position on a French horn is not set up for the acoustic demands of an arena or athletic field. Marching French horns are built more like trumpets or cornets, with front-facing bells and piston valves. Yamaha,

one of the world's leading makers of marching instruments, brings the French horn to the field with their YHR-302M.

The YHR-302M has the projection and high-end force you generally expect from a trumpet, but it retains much of the warmth and sonic complexity we associate with concert French horns. Yamaha designed the YHR-302M for ergonomic balance. You won't have to strain to keep it in place during maneuvers. And if you're a French horn player intrigued by the trumpet, the YHR-302M may be a great compromise that will give you a unique onstage sound.

The YHR-302M is keyed in B ♭ , a full fifth above the usual F. Most marching music is more likely to call on the horn's higher register than its lower, so this comes in handy on the field. This may cause headaches for French horn players who are used to F transpositions, but if you are going to play French horn seriously you will need to learn how to sight-transpose anyway.

Pros

- Can be used in a jazz setting like a flugelhorn to play many trumpet parts
- A great marching instrument that brings the distinctive French horn sound to arenas and events
- Considerably lighter than a concert French horn

Cons

- B ♭ key will cause challenges for French horn players used to F transpositions

Specs

- Key: B ♭
- Playing Weight: 3.5 lbs
- Bore Size: .472″
- Shank: Standard French Horn
- Bell Size: 10 1/8″
- Body Material: Yellow Brass
- Leadpipe Material: Yellow Brass
- Valves: 3 Pistons
- Valve Material: Nickel-Silver
- Finish: Lacquer
- Mouthpiece: 30C4
- Case: Included

Best Professional French Horn: Conn 8D CONNstellation

Conn 8D CONNstellation

The C.G. Conn 8D “CONNstellation” has been one of the world’s most popular French horns since its introduction in 1937. When you hear an 8D, you’ll think it sounds like everything you ever expected from a French horn. That’s because many of the French horn parts you hear in recordings are played on Conn 8Ds. If you want a career as a French horn player, a Conn 8D will not seem out of place in any professional setting.

The nickel silver construction isn’t just eye-catching, it produces a dark, satiny sound with rich harmonic overtones, while the clear lacquer finish subtly mellows the music. The 8D’s large throat bell adds still more resonance, but also requires more air. While the 8D is suitable for French horn players at all levels, beginners may do better on a horn which is less taxing on their lungs.

Legendary French horns don’t come cheap, and the Conn 8D comes with a hefty price tag. But if you’re looking for the best French horn you can buy, the Conn 8D isn’t just the best French horn on Amazon. It’s one of the best French horns in the world.

Pros

- Conn 8Ds are the French horn of choice in studios and on soundtracks around the world
- Traditional broad, dark American sound
- Great dynamic range that preserves clarity in the softest and loudest passages

Cons

- Large throat bell means the Conn 8D requires more lung power than some horns

Specs

- Key of F/B ♭
- .468″ bore
- 12-1/4″ large throat nickel silver bell
- All nickel silver construction
- Tapered rotors and bearings
- Mechanical change valve
- Adjustable lever bridge
- Clear lacquer finish
- Conn7BW mouthpiece
- 7614C plastic shell case

FAQ

Question: What is a Wagner Tuba?

Answer: The Wagner tuba is a four-valve tuba commissioned by Richard Wagner for his *Ring Cycle*. The Wagner tuba combines many of the features of a tuba and a French horn and is most often played as a second instrument by French horn players. Tenor B ♭ Wagner tubas have the range of a euphonium, while a bass F Wagner tuba has the range of a tuba in F. The Wagner tuba's sound has been described as smoky, haunting, and unearthly, though the higher partials are even more challenging on a Wagner tuba than on a French horn!

Question: Were French Horns invented in France?

Answer: Despite their name, French horns actually originated in Germany. In the early 1800s an instrument maker named Heinrich Stölzel invented a system of pistons, and later rotary valves, that changed a horn's tubing length. (Before this horn players had to change keys by switching mouthpiece crooks). The new valved horn was called the "Waldhorn" (forest horn) or simply the "Horn" in Germany.

There are several theories as to why the English speaking world calls it a French horn. Some scholars believe the big valved instruments reminded the British of the larger hunting horns used in France. Others believe English musicians of the Baroque era purchased most of their horns from French, and the name "French horn" predates the instrument that goes by that label today.

Question: What is a Vienna horn?

Answer: Vienna horns use special valves called *pumpenvalven*. These valves have paddle keys like rotary valves, but use a piston mechanism to open and close the pipes. The action is slower and fast passages are more challenging, but the *pumpenvalven* produce a smooth legato which has long been prized by Viennese conductors.

The Vienna horn is said to sound more like the natural horns used in pre-valve orchestras, with a beautiful mellow ringing tone. Though they are not often seen outside of Austria, a Vienna horn might come in very handy when playing the works of the many composers who premiered works in Vienna.

Conclusion

There's no easy way around it: French horns are expensive. While the Mendini and Jupiter horns might work for a student, **for most serious French horn players the Conn 8D CONNstellation is the best French horn.** You can spend more on a French horn, but the Conn 8D is the instrument of choice for French horn players worldwide.

If you can't afford a new French horn, used French horns are available at many instrument stores and online. While you can sometimes find great instruments for very reasonable prices, keep in mind that French horn repairs are expensive and that horn you get at a bargain price may leave you spending several times as much to bring it to a playable condition. I recommend buying used French horns in person and through an instrument shop (with an onsite repairman) that you trust.

Whatever choice you make, best of luck making music with your French horn and happy playing!

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