

A Horn Maker on Mouthpieces

October 28, 2010, John Ericson

How you perceive the playing qualities of a horn you are testing will be impacted quite a bit by what horn you have been playing lately and by mouthpiece choice and fit. At present myself I always have available three versions of [my mouthpiece of choice](#), a standard shank version, a slightly smaller than standard version, and a European shank version. When testing a horn of a student I pick the one that I think should fit it best. For sure certain horns will test better when you have the right mouthpiece on them.



[Horn Maker Jacob Medlin recently posted in his blog an item on this very topic](#) that reveals in his case what mouthpiece he has primarily set his horns up to use. He wrote,

Mouthpieces matter. I think that as horn players we all knew that but I have found the mouthpiece to be an annoying game changer when it comes to the final balance of a horn. A horn that I am able to get playing really well with my Laskey, suddenly plays stiffer and stuffier with a different mouthpiece. This is a problem for customers who are unable to pick the horn up at the shop.

He notes in particular that

*My horns love the Laskey 775F (only because its my usual mouthpiece and the one I do my play testing on.) This means that deeper, more funnel shaped mouthpieces play the best on my leadpipe. If you play a smaller one, its possible the horn might feel "tight". **Try to avoid a European shanked mouthpiece with my horns!** They will not hit the right depth to meet the venturi.*

I have written pretty recently about [European shank mouthpieces](#); for certain horns (for example Alexander) these make a huge difference but, by the same token, if you use a European shank mouthpiece on a typical American horn it really won't play correctly.

Medlin also notes that for him another option is for you to send your mouthpiece to him and he can balance the setup of the horn to match it. I feel sure other custom makers can do the same; it is something to consider and is an element that every horn maker has given quite a bit of thought to.

Following up on one final point, at the start of this article I mentioned that how you perceive a horn you are testing is also influenced by what horn you have been playing. There is something about the general resistance of a horn that impacts many things subtly in your playing including such things as how you tongue, how you control your air, etc. The way you have developed these things is based on what worked on the horn and mouthpiece you play. When you test another horn it may actually be a fine horn but not play up to potential for you due to not only the mouthpiece setup but also how you try to play it. It is a big topic that I will come back to at some point in the future.