

GUIDELINES FOR TESTING BASSOON BOCALS

by John Miller (January, 1997)

1. Always play as many bocals as you can, whenever the opportunity arises, whether they are for sale or not. This helps you to build up knowledge and experience of exactly what the bocal contributes to your playing set-up, and will make it easier to decide if you should buy a specific bocal that you are testing. Remember that you cannot tell in advance which bocal will be best for a particular instrument. They are more like reeds than you would expect!
2. When trying multiple bocals, start by using only one criterion for elimination. I recommend looking first for high note response, and reject any that don't meet your minimum requirements, which should be set higher than what you can accomplish with your best bocal. An example of a minimum standard would be "must be capable of reliable attack on d4 or c#4".
3. After going through the bocals checking for this capability, test the ones that pass, for another variable.
4. Continue to cull bocals, based on examining one variable at a time.
5. Here are some important variables to be considered:
 - Pitch
 - pp attacks
 - Low register response
 - Smoothness of slurs
 - Stability on c#2 and e2
6. When you get down to several bocals that seem to do what you want, and feel good to play, you are ready to test them more thoroughly with real-life applications.
7. During a period of several days you should play the bocals in a concert hall or large space so that you can judge the size of the sound. Try to have someone listen at a distance and always compare one bocal to another.
8. Be sure that you like the tone quality of a bocal before purchasing it. You must be able to rule out the reed's influence on this judgment.
9. Play long and sustained etudes with the test bocals to be sure that they are comfortable on your lips. A bocal can seem to be the best in all respects, but be too stiff or resistant to use.
10. Play the bocal in an ensemble, even if it is just one other player. It is too difficult to judge a bocal's true flexibility when playing alone.

The main source for Heckel bocals in the USA is in the Chicago area:

EDMUND NIELSEN WOODWINDS
61 E. Park Boulevard
Villa Park, IL 60181
630-833-5676
[www. Nielsen-woodwinds.com](http://www.Nielsen-woodwinds.com)

Another good source is in Minneapolis:

MIDWEST MUSICAL IMPORTS
2021 East Hennepin Avenue Suite 374
Minneapolis, MN 55413
800-926-5587
www.mmimports.com