

Tips from the Workbench Ozwinds Brisbane

Tip #6 – Woodwind Instruments in the Car

This tip relates to a common problem that very often goes unnoticed. It's the type of thing that can make an instrument less responsive, creating a poor playing experience.

I've noticed that people who travel around with their instruments tend to leave them in the car. This happens even when people are spending time at the workshop here.

Although I don't hound people about it, I quietly feel slightly concerned... I know it can be unavoidable, but here is what can happen in this situation

The tip is: *Never leave clarinets in the car.*

This advice can apply to other woodwind instruments also, and the effects will be almost exactly the same (there are some small differences).

Our Queensland heat is one of the worst for our musical instruments. It is not the same in some other states, and the problem may also depend on how well insulated your car is.

What can go wrong?

- Pads can fall out, or change position
- The clarinet body can warp (plastic clarinets)
- The clarinet body can warp and crack (wooden clarinets)
- Synthetic pads can warp
- Traditional pads can warp

Clarinet Body

Unfortunately, I have seen many clarinets that needed to have the tone-holes flattened because they had warped - new pads could not be fitted properly.

Although the plastic clarinet bodies seem to be rigid enough, they are precision instruments, and the heat of our summer sun can change them enough to cause problems.

Have you ever left a credit card on the dash of your car? You can find images of the results online. This is how plastic bodies of clarinets move.

The clarinet is still likely to work, but it is likely to feel more unresponsive than it did previously.

Clarinet Pads

Not only can heat move the pads on a clarinet, but it can also damage them. In many cases, the keys that are already held shut on the clarinet (most of them) will remain sealing. For the pads connected to the open keys, gravity will begin to take control, and move the pads into a new angle. The playability of the clarinet will depend on what the new angle is.

Synthetic Pads

There are different types of pads used on clarinets. On Yamaha clarinets, for example,



synthetic pads are now used. These types of pads can keep going for years without needing replacement, but they can be easily damaged through heat.

After a small event like this, it will be more difficult to play the notes over the break.

Traditional Pads

For other clarinet pad types, the heat from the car can age the cardboard, felt and the skin that binds the whole pad together. The cardboard and felt can warp, and the skin covering can shrink, pulling all the contents out of shape.

How likely is this to happen?

It could happen after just one sitting, or it things could slowly deteriorate after multiple sittings in the heat. Everything that you don't want to happen is more likely to happen in this type of heat. Luckily, the heat from the car often does not transfer to the inside of the case very quickly.

There are a couple of other factors that could work in your favour. It can depend on:

- How tightly the pads are fitted into the keycups.
- What type of glue has been used to fit the pads into the keycups.

Most manufacturers use a heat-sensitive glue that is VERY soft. The slightest amount of heat will move the pads. It's good to be aware of this.

In Queensland we need to use a glue that can withstand the climate here, as well as the abuses that we are likely to inflict upon them, intentionally or not.

At the workshop here, we are often advising our customers to take care when travelling or even when storing an instrument. If you have students that need instruction on these sorts of matters, feel free to send them our way.

Future Tips

If there is anything that you would like to know, and are looking for an answer, please let me know. I might be able to include it in some tips for teachers.

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