

MG Carbon Drone Reed Review

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The latest offering from MG drone reeds is a carbon fibre-tongued reed with a plastic body. The tenors have a thinner tongue than the bass, which has been on the market a bit longer than the tenors. They now go to making a set.



MG Carbon Drone Reeds

For the past 4 years, I've personally played the original (now discontinued) MG tenor reeds (small black tongue and cellulose barrels) and have found them to be fantastic. They are rock steady with a great (but rare) mix of vibrancy and depth. When testing the latest offering by MG, my expectations were high, and rightly so.

To begin with, the reeds arrived in packaging that is first class. Not only does it look impressive and speak of a product that is well backed, it also protects the reeds and provides safe ongoing storage for those pipers who like to swap reeds around for solo versus band work etc.

Sound wise, the manufacturer claims the reeds produce a "smooth, steady sound yet retain the richness of cane", and that they are "instantly steady" with "no settling in period". To some extent, such claims need to be taken with a pinch of salt; however the claims here are not too ambitious at all.

Tenors - we found the 'factory settings' on the tenor reeds were good in terms of pitch. This is a high-pitched reed with a very long reed seat, able to achieve very good tuning positions (above the hemp line) on new and old drones alike. There were no problems with a set of c. 1912 Lawries with a goatskin bag – tuning well above the hemp without any adjustments made, and withstanding condensation increases across a one hour playing window.

Tonally, the tenors presented a very smooth but deceptively bold sound that we felt needed to be trimmed back so that it did not overpower the bass. After some quick trials and adjustments, the tenors were easily matched for pitch and tone, providing a smooth but still rather 'big' presence. If anything, we got the impression this was the type of reed that would be better suited to a band 'rig' versus a solo one, or in a set of drones that might be described as 'mellow'. The steadiness in terms of pressure tolerance and also after several 'put down, pick up' tests was very impressive. These reeds are very reliable and produce a pleasing strike-in that has shades of a big set of traditional cane reeds. Some people (your scribe included) get a bit excited by this 'crank shaft' affect. That said, it was also noted that the strike-in required a lot more effort than the former set-up that was in the test instrument, even after adjustments and refinements were made.

Bass – the reed was flat and susceptible to pressure variations prior to any alterations being made. The bridle and tuning plug both had to be adjusted quite a lot in order to get the bass tuning in the right spot and also behaving in a steady fashion. This adjustment somewhat subtracted from the reeds volume.

Tonally, the reed provided a 'warm' and full sound, but perhaps didn't have the harmonic spectrum of some similar reeds on the market. That is not to say it was an unpleasant or even inadequate sound, just that it was more refined than other long-tongued synthetic bass reeds on the market. We'd describe this reed as having good 'bottom end' harmonics but perhaps not as much 'grumble' as some other bass reeds of similar construction.

As a set, the reeds combined well and performed steadily with a good tone and full sound. It was noted that the bass perhaps didn't shine through with this combination as it did when played with other tenor reed combinations, perhaps saying more about the tone and presence of the tenor reeds than the bass itself.

In summary, with some careful alterations a set of Carbon MG drone reeds will produce a very steady and full sound, suitable for both band and solo work. Our recommendation would be that the tenors are better suited for band instruments, or for mellow drones that might need some more 'juice'.

More reviews can be found at: <http://www.schoolofpiping.com/reviews.html>

To learn more about reed setting see *The Complete Pipers Handbook* or the *Reed Book DVD-Rom*.

MG Reeds, The Complete Pipers Handbook and The Reed Book DVD-Rom can be purchased from:
http://www.schoolofpiping.com/shop/bagpipes_and_accessories.html



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