

TIPS FOR PLAYING AND CARING FOR A HIDE BAG

Brett Tidswell

Hide Bags

There is an ongoing trend in the piping world to return to hide bags and also cane reeds. There are quite a lot of hide bags on the market, but in this case we are talking about natural hide that has no synthetic inner and requires seasoning. You will find a number of different types of hides available and some of these are chrome tanned and let a minimum of moisture through the leather and some are not and absorb quite a lot of moisture. The choice is yours depending on how much you play, what the weather conditions are like in your locale and how much moisture you blow through your pipes. Hides range from Sheep and Goat skin, Calf and Cow hide to the more exotic like Kangaroo and Elk hide.

Some bags are stitched seam and others glues seem. This can make a difference to sound and performance, especially the neck which could be straight or swan neck in style. The glued swan neck to me sounds quite different through the chanter to the stitched seam bags. There is always a lot of talk about tone of high A and the stitched seam bag produces a harmonic, vibrant note with more craw whereas the glued seam bags with the bigger and wider neck seem to give a clearer sound. So preference plays a large part in selection. There is of course much less possibility of a glued seam leaking except if the glue fails.



Glued seam calf skin



Stitched Seam Goat Skin

Cutting a Bag and Tying on

A good maintenance Guide such as [“The Complete Pipers Handbook”](#) will give advice on how to cut and tie on a bag. It is also a service offered by the [School of Piping Shop](#) so we will not delve too deeply into this subject here, but we should say that an experienced person will be able to measure the bag up for you and tie in angles that will make the bag comfortable and pleasant to play.

Testing a Bag

- You should regularly cork and test your bag to ensure that it is airtight.
- You should try to rotate your stocks which should remain firm in the bag.
- You should feel the bag after playing to ensure that a good quantity of seasoning is still present.
- You should visibly inspect the bag for signs of a “blow out” where moisture will build up in a specific area, or any sign of a tear or other deterioration.
- Always look down the stocks for any build up of seasoning which may dislodge and affect the reeds. Stocks can be lined up bottom to bottom so you can see through them.

Playing the Bag

With many bags they may appear not as tight as you would like when first playing. Within a few minutes they should tighten up as moisture gets back into the hide. Try playing almost every day for a short time. A 30 minute session each day will be good for the bag, much longer may start to get it too wet. Shorter and more consistent practice is not only best for the bag, but the best practice routine as well.

After Playing

Be sure to dry your pipes thoroughly. This includes emptying any water trap, drying the stocks, reeds and drone bores. This will help prevent mould growing and keeps the moisture content in the wood stable helping to prevent cracking. A few minutes after each playing session could save you a fortune in reeds and damaged parts.

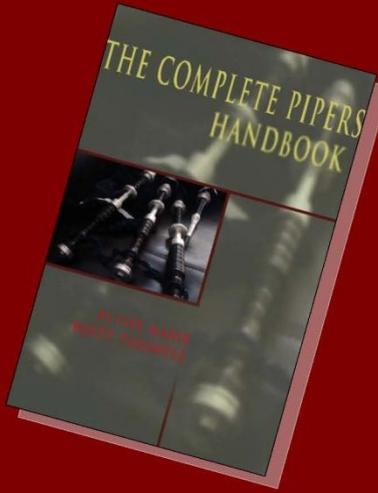
Always store your pipes properly. Drying the bag is essential but I never leave my pipes out over night and keep them in a closed case with the chanter removed and the stock corked.

Seasoning

Select an appropriate seasoning for the type of bag you have purchased. A good supplier will be able to give you advice on this topic; there is also a detailed description of seasoning in The Complete Pipers Handbook and what the different types are best suited for. Do not skimp on seasoning and think the bag is airtight so it does not need more. Seasoning does more than just keep the bag airtight; it helps attract moisture to the walls of the bag and assists absorption. Feel the bag and also smell it, you will learn to know if it needs seasoning or just a good play.

Be careful not to over season the bag as it can leak onto your reeds or may affect the moisture absorbing qualities of the hide.

There is a lot more information about bags and setting up cane drone reeds in The Complete Pipers Handbook, available from schoolofpiping.com and selected stockists.



The Complete Pipers Handbook is a must for every serious piper. Never before has a more comprehensive guide been published. Maintenance, set up, refinement, tuning, setting up bands, performance psychology and much more!

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