

Care and Maintenance of the Rotary Valve Brass

(French horn, some tubas)

You Will Need:

1. Soft cloth (cotton or flannel)
2. Flexible brush (also called a “snake”)
3. Mouthpiece brush
4. Tuning slide grease
5. Rotary Valve Oil

Daily Care

1. Never leave your instrument unattended. It takes very little time for someone to take it.
2. The safest place for your horn is in the case. Leave it there when you’re not playing.
3. Do not let other people use your instrument. They may not know how to hold and care for it.
4. Do not use your case as a chair, foot rest or step stool. It is not designed for that kind of weight.
5. Lay your case flat on the floor before opening it. Do not let it fall open.
6. Do not hit your mouthpiece, it can get stuck.
7. Do not lift your instrument by the valves or tuning slides. Use the bell and outside tubes.
8. No loose items in your case. Anything loose will damage your instrument or get stuck in it.
9. Do not put music in your case, unless space is provided for it. If you have to fold it or if it touches the instrument, it shouldn’t be there.
10. If you eat or drink anything before playing, rinse your mouth with water or brush your teeth first.
11. It may not need it every day, but keep your valves oiled with rotary oil.
 - a. Pull the tuning slides and drop oil directly into the hole.
12. French horns: water collects mostly in the lead pipe and valve slides. To get water out of the valve slides:
 - a. Hold the horn in playing position.
 - b. Push all three valves down (thumb doesn’t matter if you have one).
 - c. Rotate the horn forward, so your valve hand is down.
 - d. Rotate back to playing position.
 - e. Release the valves.
 - f. Pull out the third tuning slide(s), pour out the water, put them back.

Weekly Cleaning

1. Brush the inside of the mouthpiece with a mild soap and water. Rinse and dry.
2. Wipe the fingerprints and dirt off of your instrument with your soft cloth. This will keep it looking nice. Also, your fingerprints will eventually cause the lacquer (shiny stuff) to fall off if you leave them on the instrument.
 - a. Do NOT use any kind of polish on the instrument. Wiping it clean is enough.

Monthly Cleaning

1. While you are practicing, leave your empty case open in the sun. The warmth will dry out any moisture and keep your case from smelling bad.
2. Vacuum the inside of your case.

Winter Break, Spring Break, and Summer

1. Read all of this before starting! You don’t want to get halfway through and find a step you don’t understand.
2. Label four clean sheets of paper: “tuning slides” “1st valve slides” “2nd valve slides” “3rd valve slides”
3. Fill a bath tub ½ full with lukewarm (not hot!) water. Add some mild soap (not detergent!) while it is filling. Hot water and detergent can strip the lacquer off your instrument.
4. Do NOT remove or disassemble the valves.
5. Remove the valve caps (they are silver and twist off). Let them soak in the tub, scrub them a bit, then dry and set aside.

< INSTRUCTIONS CONTINUE ON OTHER SIDE >

6. Remove a couple slides at a time and soak in the water for a few minutes to loosen dirt.
 - a. Don't do them all at once, you might lose track of which slide goes where.
 - b. While in the tub, wipe the outside with the cloth and use the snake to brush the inside of the slides several times.
 - c. Rinse, then dry the slides with a soft cloth and put them on the matching piece of labeled paper.
 - d. Repeat step 6 until all slides are cleaned.
7. After all the slides are out, soak the instrument for a few minutes. Then wipe it with the cloth and brush all the tubes several times.
8. Drain the soapy water and rinse the horn thoroughly inside and out.
 - a. As you know, there are many places for water to get stuck in your instrument. Be sure you rotate it about five times to get as much water out as is possible.
9. Dry all parts with a soft, lint-free cloth, including inside the bell as far as you can reach.

NOTE If you are not going to play for months, don't oil or grease the parts. Leave them dry.

10. Hold the horn with the valve shafts pointing up and put three drops of oil down each tuning slide shaft.
11. Grease all tuning slides with tuning slide grease and put them back in the horn in the right places. Push the slides ALL the way in, and then pull them back out a little bit.
 - a. If you have a double horn, the shorter valve slides ones go behind the longer ones.
12. Put one drop of oil under the valve cap where the rotor turns on the valve.
13. Replace the valve caps.

Regular Check-ups

To keep your instrument in top working condition, have it checked by a qualified repair person once per year (Winter break is better than summer, repair shops are not as busy). Regular maintenance keeps an instrument in good playing condition for a period of years, rather than allowing it gradually to deteriorate, becoming more difficult to play and more expensive to repair.

