

## YAMAHA BARITONE SAXOPHONES

YBS-82 c.£9,500–£10,000

YBS-62II c.£7,500

YBS-480 c.£5,500–£6,000

In recent years we've been blessed with a whole host of new saxophones, but most of these have been focused around altos. Now, however, Yamaha has decided it's high time we had some new baritones to play with!

The Yamaha 62 has been one of the most popular baritones for many years, used by professionals the world over and with a reputation for being a well-made and reliable instrument. But now, for the first time, Yamaha has introduced a Custom model (YBS-82) to its baritone line-up, as well as a new intermediate model (YBS-480), and has also updated the YBS-62 (Yamaha refer to the new model as the YBS-62II to distinguish it from the old model). Never one to miss out on a new piece of gear, I headed down to Dawkes Music in Maidenhead to put them through their paces.

There are a few design changes common to all of Yamaha's new baritones, including a shorter bell and a revised key layout. You can instantly see the change in bell length, and the idea behind this is that it improves intonation; it's fair to say you'd be hard pushed to find a set of baritones that play more in tune than these new models. The changes to the keywork are more subtle, with an adjustable front F key and redesigned low A, octave, and left and right-hand pinky keys. The left-hand palm keys have also been redesigned, and it is noticeable that these not only feel naturally positioned, but also very sturdy. A couple of final alterations are the position of the strap ring to help balance the instrument and the option of attaching a peg when playing seated.

There are a few key differences between the models, most noticeably in the brass they are made from. The 82 is the first baritone model where Yamaha has used its 'Custom Alloy', as found in models such as the YAS-82Z and YAS-875EX. While the 82 benefits from Yamaha's finest materials, the 62II is also made from a different, higher quality brass compound than the cheaper 480, which is reflected in the sound. Other differences that you instantly notice are that the 480 is the only model in the line-up that is not engraved and comes with a case that doesn't have wheels. Finally, while all three models feature a peg receiver, only the 82 is supplied with the actual peg. If you would like to use a peg with the 62 or 480, you have to buy this separately.

So, aside from the technical info, how do the instruments play? First up, the 480, and what an instrument this is! Despite being the 'cheapest' (around £5,500 to £6,000), it really is quite an instrument. The first thing you notice is how easy it is to play. The whole instrument speaks effortlessly across the range right from the bottom all the way up into the altissimo. The sax feels solidly built, and the redesigned low



YBS-82 Custom baritone

A key feels like a piece of heavy machinery that gives you every confidence it's going to get all the pads closing properly. The sound on the 480 is direct and there is very little resistance, making it the perfect instrument for a student or someone switching to baritone for the first time. The keywork fits naturally under the fingers and the playing position feels just right, so the repositioned strap ring must be doing its job.

The only real criticism I have of the 480 is that it lacks the depth of sound found in the more expensive models. I imagine this must be down to the brass. The sound is a little one-dimensional, and while it's effortless to play and has excellent intonation, I can't coax as many different colours and subtleties out of it as I would like. That said, this is likely to be of more importance to a baritone specialist than someone using it as a doubling instrument or student and amateur players, and I couldn't name an instrument in this price bracket that performs better.

As we move up the price bracket to the YBS-62 (c. £7,500) it is a remarkably similar story to the 480, in that it feels an incredibly well-made saxophone with a very easy and immediate response, and excellent intonation across the full range. It is instantly noticeable that the 62 is a more resistant saxophone than the 480, but coupled with this is more depth to the sound and a range of tonal colours missing in the 480. It is also worth noting that the 62II benefits from a top F sharp key, which isn't present on the 480. Compared with the original 62, this updated version does feel like it has been slimmed down and tightened up. It feels lighter, more compact and is very ergonomic, but nothing has been lost in the sound by doing this and it still packs plenty of punch. The sound is flexible and I would be happy to use this in virtually any setting (with the right mouthpiece) from classical right through to pop and funk.

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Finally, moving on to the YBS-82 (c. £9,500 to £10,000), there are a few extra touches. Firstly, the bell is in one piece, whereas it is in two sections on the cheaper models, and it is also supplied with the Custom C1 neck. It is hard to say which of the differences between the 62II and 82 make the difference to the feel and the sound (the bell, the crook, the material?), but the combined effect is that the sax is a little more resistant to play and has a little more weight to the sound. Having spent some time playing both the 62II and the 82, I would be hard pushed to pick one over the other. Both are top-notch professional instruments and share many characteristics, from ease of play and ergonomic design through to impeccable intonation. For me, the 82 has a little more depth to the sound, but in gaining this has possibly lost a tiny bit of the brightness that the 62II can produce. To my

mind, this means the two saxophones are slightly better suited for different types of playing. If you are looking for plenty of punch and crisp articulation, I would head for the 62II, but if you are looking for depth of sound, I would favour the 82. If money were no object, I would very much view these saxophones as alternatives rather than the more expensive 82 necessarily being the better instrument. Incidentally, I would think the same way about the Yanagisawa BWO1 and BWO10.

In conclusion, Yamaha has provided us with three excellent new baritones that are well worth considering. The 62II and 82 are surely two of the best baritones on the market, while the 480 is an excellent choice if your budget won't quite stretch to the professional models. If you're spending serious money on a new baritone, it's worth trying out as many as you can, and the main competitors to these new Yamaha's are those by Selmer (Serie II and Serie III) and Yanagisawa (BWO1 and BWO10).

Alastair Penman

If you'd like to hear the Yamaha 480, 62II and 82 in action, you can watch demo videos at [www.alastairpenman.co.uk/cass/ybs](http://www.alastairpenman.co.uk/cass/ybs)  
CASSGB would like to thank Dawkes Music for lending the instruments for this review.



YBS-82 with peg attached



YBS-62II bell