

# Advantages of Alternate Slide Positions

Vern Kagarice

Vol 6, #3, p.34 (Jan-Feb 1991)

[Complete article from BANDWORLD Magazine]

Most professional trombonists would readily agree that alternate slide positions are a necessity for maintaining a high level of technical facility. On the other hand, students are often reluctant to use many of the commonly used alternates. As a result they do not develop an adequate amount of slide technique. Most of the time the importance of alternates has not been emphasized enough in the student's early training. On the surface this may not appear to be a serious problem as long as the player can manipulate the slide fast enough to keep up. However, most trombonists are eventually confronted with a passage that cannot be played without the use of alternate positions. Therefore, their importance cannot be over-emphasized.

Improvement of slide technique is not the only advantage of using alternate positions. Since most of the alternate positions fall in fourth to seventh positions, much of the emphasis should be on the extended slide positions. An awareness of all the notes possible in these positions will refine a player's intonation, legato style, slide technique, and flexibility.

The usual excuse for using regular positions on everything is that they are much better in tune, and they tend to give a more centered sound. This may be true for the inexperienced player whose contact with alternates has been to play a bugle call in sixth position. However, when a player is forced by his teacher to use alternate positions, and play them in tune, the first step has been taken toward becoming an accomplished player.

The trombonist's legato style will also improve with the use of additional alternate positions. A see-saw or pumping slide motion often breaks down the musical line in a legato passage, except when the sequence of positions are adjacent to each other. (For example, 3-4, 3-4 or 4-5-4-5.) By using alternates, the player can smooth out the musical line and eliminate wasted arm motion. This in turn allows the slide arm to relax and improve the flow of sound even more. A generally accepted rule is to use positions that are as close to each other as possible. There are occasional exceptions, but this rule will usually apply. The result of this approach allows the player to develop slide patterns rather than an awkward new slide direction for each note. When there is a change in direction of over one position, there may be a break or jerk in the musical line. Therefore, the player should strive to play as many notes as possible on one arm motion. The wise use of alternate positions will then permit the player to develop the arm relaxation necessary for good legato style.

Alternate positions may also be important in prolonging the player's endurance. If a player is faced with a lot of intensive playing that causes undue strain on the embouchure, the use of extended positions can help the player. The F above the bass clef is a note which may be played in sharp fourth position rather than first for endurance reasons. Paul Hindemith's Sonata for Trombone is an example of a work that can be an endurance

problem if alternate positions are not utilized. The calculated use of sharp fourth position on F will allow the player to finish much stronger than he would by always catering to first position.

Additional alternate positions are possible with the use of the F attachment. The F trigger is especially advantageous in the middle and low registers. With the use of the trigger, all but one note above low E (below the bass clef) can be played in at least two different positions. The single exception is bottom space F#. This offers the trombonist a choice of positions for more than an octave lower than the regular tenor trombone.

With the effective use of the F attachment some awkward scale patterns can be played much easier. Note the three scales in Examples 1, 2, and 3, showing various slide combinations.

Three possible ways are given to play each of these scales. The first example of each scale (A) shows the positions usually used by the tenor trombonist without an F attachment. The second (B) shows the smoothest possible pattern, making use of the trigger. The third (C) shows the use of the trigger in a way which may at times be advantageous.

By looking closely at these examples, the following points can be made:

Example 1: The motion of first position in 1A is eliminated in 1B and 1C with the use of the trigger. This will be helpful in both legato and technical passages.

Example 2: The motion of first to sixth position in 2A is also eliminated in 2B and 2C by using the trigger. 2C shows a common misuse of the F attachment on an Ab scale pattern. The first to fifth motion is almost as bad as having no trigger at all. This motion is eliminated in 2B by using a flat third position with the trigger and moving to sixth position.

Example 3: The use of the trigger on Bb and Cb in 3B eliminates the awkward motion of first to seventh position. The trigger is not used to best advantage in 3C.

These examples show how the trigger can be used to good advantage in developing slide technique. There are some slide patterns that deserve special attention in a discussion of alternate positions.

In Example 4, Eb is the pitch that determines whether or not alternates should be used. If the sequence involves an E natural, no alternates should be included. In Example 5, the fifth position Gb and Db should be approached and left via sixth position rather than first. Not only is it a shorter distance, but it can also be played better in tune. In Example 6, the sharp fifth position Bb is a helpful alternate for and Eb major or minor arpeggiated pattern for improving the flow of a musical line. This applies to both tongued and slurred passages. If these patterns are learned as total units and are played as actual slide patterns rather than individual notes, the player's technical facility will be greatly enhanced.

When a player has developed the ability to recognize sequential patterns involving alternate positions at sight, he has made a big step toward becoming a proficient trombonist.

Source: 6•3•34