

## A Checklist for Choosing a New Banjo

Making music is a fun and creative outlet, It can be expensive if you collect expensive instruments. But compared to cable TV, Golf, boating, skiing, and driving, hunting, raising pets, or sky diving, it's cheap. Especially if you are wise and purchase good instruments with high resale value.

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to buy the best instrument you can afford. I know many people who have wasted money on banjos that looked good, and even sounded pretty good for a while. Then the instrument starts needing continual adjustment, and unfortunately never delivers top-tier performance. Then people lose money on a trade for a slightly better instrument which still doesn't measure up over time. Even after a player has lost money several times over on inferior banjos and settled on one he thought would be his last, invariably a picky player's ear begins to seek alternate sounds.

Please don't just go out and buy a banjo just because somebody said it was the best. Make your best choice by learning what really makes a banjo great.

The following is a list of things that I find important as a player and a builder. You'll have your own priorities however, like how it sounds and looks, but the following are banjo luthier's details that may not be obvious to you but are worth considering when looking for the best banjo possible.

- \* Smooth dressed frets (wider frets wear slower)
- \* Ergonomically contoured playing surface (compound radius retains neck integrity while improving playability)
- \* No excessive weight (professional banjos can be 7 pounds or less)
- \* Neck angle adjustability (don't expect coordinator rods to give you much if any adjustment)
- \* Evenly tensioned head (Helical mounting guarantees even-ness)
- \* Low enough string height with high enough bridge (taller bridges increase power and sustain)
- \* Beveled non-metal armrest (metal armrests cut down circulation in your arm)
- \* Bridge properly compensated for intonation and optimal action on each string (bridge should be custom fitted to each banjo)
- \* Easy head changing (Save time for more practice)
- \* Wide and generous Neck to body interface (for tuning stability and solid sound)
- \* Dual point anchoring for tail piece (tailpiece shouldn't move from side to side)
- \* Easy string changes (avoid tailpieces with covers for quickest changes)
- \* Straight-line tailpiece design (keeps string energy directed straight into head)
- \* Flexibility of options (does it have adaptability for alternative tone components or necks?)
- \* Two way adjustable truss rod (too often they won't correct a back bow-Check under truss rod cover)

