Electronic Practice Chanters Compared

What the models can do and why I am switching to the Blair

An electronic chanter looks like a practice chanter and is fingered the same way. Instead of a reed, sensors detect the fingers, and the sound comes from headphones or a speaker. This lets you practise at any time of day without disturbing neighbours or family, and the pitch is always perfectly in tune.

On this page I present the well-known models: the Blair Digital Chanter, the DegerPipes, now in their third version, the Fagerström Technopipes and the p2chanter by Solda. I know the DegerPipes II from my own experience. Everything else is based on manufacturers' information and test reports.

1. My experience with the DegerPipes II

I practised with the DegerPipes II for a very long time, until spring 2026. I did not find it bad at all, on the contrary: you can play it practically anywhere you would never be allowed to play a practice chanter, on a plane, in the doctor's waiting room or during a break at work, without disturbing anyone. Whenever I wanted to do certain exercises while away from home, it therefore served me well.

The drawback lies in the sensors. The DegerPipes has no real finger holes, only contacts that sense whether a finger is on them or not. So there is no such thing as a hole that is not fully covered, and therefore none of the mistakes you hear immediately on a real chanter: the squeal of a half-open hole or crossing noises between two notes. If you practise only on the DegerPipes, you will not notice whether you really close the holes cleanly. That is why I am now switching and would like to buy the Blair Digital Chanter.

2. How the chanters detect the fingers

Many electronic chanters work with touch sensors: metal contacts that sense whether a finger is touching them. This is simple, but has weaknesses. Very dry or damp fingers disturb detection. Notes then stick or do not sound at all. Buyers of the DegerPipes II report exactly that with dry skin, and some help themselves with hand cream. The DegerPipes III also works with touch sensors, in an improved form according to the manufacturer. On the Solda p2chanter the contacts sit in finger recesses, and the electronics continuously measure how well the skin conducts and adjust themselves accordingly. The Fagerström Technopipes Mk II also uses contacts, but according to the dealer detects crossing noises between two notes.

The Blair Digital Chanter takes a different approach. It has real finger holes with light sensors inside. A note only changes when the hole is covered and no more light gets in. The sensitivity can be adjusted for each hole individually. In his review on pipesdrums.com, Matt MacIsaac writes that the real holes feel quite different under the fingers from contacts, and that unlike touch sensors the light sensors do not suffer from sweat. He did, however, have to readjust the sensors a little every day. The NYC Bagpipes

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review said that a hole has to be completely closed, “at least theoretically”. With some effort a note could also be triggered with a hole not fully closed. For playing outdoors in the sun there is a separate setting against ambient light. The new Fagerström Technopipes Optical also has optical finger holes which, according to the dealer, work regardless of dry skin.

On crossing noises, NYC Bagpipes writes: the Fagerström Technopipes reveals them very clearly, sometimes almost too strictly. Other chanters swallow them and can thus instil bad habits. Whether the Blair makes a half-open hole squeal like a real chanter, I found no information in any review.

3. The Blair Digital Chanter

The Blair Digital Chanter comes from Murray Blair in Australia, a piper and sound engineer. It plays recordings of real instruments: Great Highland Bagpipe, smallpipes in A and practice chanter. The chanter holds up to nine instruments. More than 20 further sounds can be loaded from a free online library.

The pitch can be set from 429.0 to 499.9 Hz, and each note individually. There is vibrato on selected notes, a separate drone volume, reverb, treble and bass as well as a metronome with eight rhythms. Headphones or speakers are connected via a 3.5 mm jack, so the Blair can also be played quietly anywhere. MIDI and the connection to the computer run via USB. There is no Bluetooth. The software is available for Windows and Mac.

According to the dealer, the built-in battery lasts four to six hours per charge. In the pipesdrums.com review it was about four and a half. It is charged via USB and can be replaced by the user. The battery has a two-year warranty, and the dealer states its lifespan as at least six years, depending on use and care.

Both reviews praise the sound: on a recording it is hard to tell that it is an electronic instrument, and the embellishments sound much more real than on chanters with touch sensors. Criticism was aimed at the slightly too sharp high A and at the practice chanter sound. The Blair also recognises embellishments in its MIDI output. This matters if you want to play straight into a notation program with the chanter. CelticPipes has explicitly supported the Blair since version 4.

The price is €698.30, or €835.00 with engraving. It comes with a padded case, a mouthpiece and a USB cable. A matching digital bag (Ergo2 Digital Bag) is available for €668.00, with which the chanter can be played like a bagpipe.

4. DegerPipes II

The DegerPipes II has the size and hole spacing of a long practice chanter, but is about 5 cm shorter than the first model. A crystal oscillator and a microprocessor keep the scale and drones accurately tuned. The pitch can be adjusted over more than three octaves, and the drones can be adjusted in volume or switched off. There are five sounds: Great Highland Bagpipe, medieval pipes, gaita, smallpipes and soft smallpipes.

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According to the manufacturer, two AAA batteries last up to 100 hours. Headphones are included. There is no built-in speaker. MIDI and headphones can be used at the same time. At Kilts & More the II has meanwhile been replaced by the III. A UK dealer still lists it for £390.83.

5. DegerPipes III

The DegerPipes III is the successor of the II. According to the manufacturer the chanter has been completely redesigned. New are a built-in speaker that switches on automatically when no headphones are plugged in, improved sensors, a better sound with reverb and chorus, and further instruments, including uilleann pipes. For the Great Highland Bagpipe there are three fingerings (minimal, standard and enhanced), plus fingerings for gaita, medieval pipes, shepherd's pipe and baroque instruments.

The scale is in just intonation, equal temperament on request. Transposition is in semitone steps. A metronome is built in, and settings are saved automatically. MIDI is available via USB without a driver and via a jack socket that can also be used as an input for accompaniment, for example drums. Two AAA batteries last 60 to 100 hours, 20 to 40 hours with the speaker. The price is €465.00, the PLUS version with even more fingerings €480.00.

6. Fagerström Technopipes

The Technopipes come in two versions. The Mk II works with touch contacts whose sensitivity can be adjusted and, according to the dealer, detects crossing noises between the notes. A metronome and a recording function are built in, with which you can listen to what you played slower or faster. MIDI is via a supplied cable. It runs on a single AAA battery for up to about 30 hours and is small enough to fit in a jacket pocket. It has no speaker. Battery, headphones and case must be bought separately. In the NYC Bagpipes review the embellishments sounded much less lively than on the Blair. Price: €257.30.

The newer Technopipes Optical has the same functions, but optical finger holes instead of contacts. It calibrates itself, the sensitivity can also be adjusted manually, and it lasts up to about 20 hours on one AAA battery. It is available for the Great Highland Bagpipe, for French and Galician bagpipes and as a multi version. Price: €265.00, the multi version €75.00 more.

7. Solda p2chanter

The p2chanter is made in Germany. Size and hole spacing correspond to a pipe chanter. The contacts sit in finger recesses, and the electronics continuously adjust themselves to the skin. The sounds Great Highland Bagpipe, Scottish smallpipe and whistle were recorded from real instruments. Drones can be switched on, and a metronome is built in. It has built-in speakers that switch off as soon as headphones are plugged in. It sends MIDI to the computer via USB, and the firmware can be updated by the user.

A special feature is the pressure sensor, available as an accessory for €63.60. With it the p2chanter can be fitted into your own bagpipe. The sound is then controlled by the air pressure in the bag, as on a real bagpipe. The p2chanter runs on two AAA batteries. The manufacturer gives no running time. Batteries, headphones and the USB cable (€5.80) are not included. Price: €507.20.

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8. The differences at a glance

	Blair Digital Chanter	DegerPipes II	DegerPipes III
Finger detection	light sensors in real finger holes, adjustable per hole	touch sensors, no holes	touch sensors, improved
Sound	recordings of real instruments	electronically generated, 5 sounds	new sound, reverb and chorus, more instruments
Highland fingering	yes	yes	yes, three variants
Embellishments recognised via MIDI	yes	not stated	not stated
Speaker	no	no	yes, built in
Power	battery, 4–6 h per charge, user-replaceable, lifespan at least 6 years	2 × AAA, up to 100 h	2 × AAA, 60–100 h (20–40 with speaker)
Tuning	429.0–499.9 Hz, each note individually	over 3 octaves	just or equal temperament, semitone steps
MIDI	via USB	yes	USB without driver and jack
Play-along input	not stated	not stated	yes, via audio input
Matching bag	yes (Ergo2, €668)	not stated	not stated
Price	€698.30 / €835.00 engraved	£390.83 (UK dealer)	€465.00 / PLUS €480.00

	Technopipes Mk II	Technopipes Optical	p2chanter
Finger detection	touch contacts, adjustable, detects crossing noises	optical finger holes, self-calibrating	contacts in finger recesses, self-calibrating
Sound	bagpipe sound with adjustable drones	as Mk II	recordings of real instruments
Speaker	no (accessory €19)	not stated	yes, built in
Power	1 × AAA, up to approx. 30 h	1 × AAA, up to approx. 20 h	2 × AAA, not stated
MIDI	yes, cable included	yes, cable included	via USB (cable €5.80)
Special feature	recording with variable tempo, fits in a pocket	also for French and Galician bagpipes	pressure sensor for your own bagpipe (€63.60)
Price	€257.30	€265.00	€507.20

9. Which one suits whom?

The Blair comes closest to the real bagpipe, in fingering as well as in sound, and it plays music straight into a notation program. In return it costs considerably more. The DegerPipes III costs less, runs for a long time on ordinary batteries and has a speaker, so you can also use it without headphones and cables. For other bagpipes besides the Great Highland Bagpipe, the Deger has the most fingerings. The Technopipes are the cheapest and smallest, and the Optical version adds optical finger holes. With the pressure sensor, the p2chanter can even be played in your own bagpipe.

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For years the DegerPipes II was a good companion on the road for me. But because I also want to notice whether I close the holes cleanly when practising quietly, and because I want to play my tunes straight into CelticPipes, my choice now is the Blair Digital Chanter.

As of October 2026. Information according to the manufacturers' websites (deger.com, p2chanter.com), the DegerPipes III user manual, product pages of Kilts & More, Kinnaird Bagpipes and Band Supplies, and the reviews by Matt MacIsaac (pipesdrums.com, 4 February 2018) and NYC Bagpipes (20 November 2021). Euro prices at Kilts & More, October 2026. Prices may change.

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