



The Sporran

With the kilt, a sporran is a real necessity. A **Sporran** is a pouch (the word is simply the Scottish Gaelic for 'purse'). The official Band sporran is the issued black leather "day" sporran without cantle. The top of the sporran should be worn a hand's breadth below the belt buckle or just below the bottom of the waistcoat.

Now a decorative part of Highland dress, it was originally an everyday practical item. Made of leather or fur, it usually has more or less elaborate silver or other ornamentation, especially on the clasp or hanger. It is worn on a chain or belt around the waist, allowing the sporran to lie below the waist of the person wearing a kilt.

Since the traditional kilt does not have pockets, the sporran serves as a wallet and container for any other necessary personal items (such as a hip-flask). It is essentially a survival of the common European medieval belt-pouch, superseded elsewhere as clothing came to have pockets, but continuing in the Scottish Highlands because of the lack of these accessories in traditional dress.

The sporran also protects a person's decency. This was originally because the ancient 'great plaid' (Gaelic *breacan an fhèilidh*), formed of a long draped cloth, had a gap at the front, and in more modern times because the kilt is traditionally worn without undergarments. Historically, the sporran was used to carry a day's rations.

There are several categories of sporrans, each with their proper attire:



Day Sporrans", like we wear in the Band, are usually simple brown or black leather pouches with little adornment. These "day" sporrans often have three leather tassels and some Celtic knots embossed in the leather. Traditionalists prefer brown or buff-colored sporrans, belts, and shoes for day wear.

Dress Sporrans" are larger than the day variety, and are more ornate. Victorian examples were often ostentatious, and very different from the simple leather pouch of the 17th or 18th centuries. They usually have chrome or silver cantles trimming the top of the pouch and a fur-covered face with fur or hair tassels. The cantle may contain intricate filigree or etchings of Celtic knots. The top

of the cantle may have a set stone, jewel, or emblems

"Military Sporrans" may be worn with regimental attire. Pipers will often wear the most flamboyant sporrans with long horsehair that swishes from side to side as the piper marches.

New legislation in the European Union to protect vulnerable species could affect kilt wearers, who may need a license to show that sporrans made later than 1994 do not come from endangered or illegally killed animals. The law is aimed at protecting wild animals such as badgers, otters, hedgehogs and wild cats.

Silver-mounted sporrans should be reserved for more formal occasions. Plain leather or animal masked sporrans are appropriate for daywear and, interestingly enough, the animal masked sporran is one of the few all-purpose sporrans that can be worn with the most formal dress or the most informal wear.

One item of interest is that when a gentleman is dressed in Highland attire and dances with a lady, he should move the sporran to his left hip. This, of course, is desirable when you are dancing cheek to cheek. For Scottish country dancing, you may want to take up your sporran belt a couple of notches, especially if you are wearing an animal head sporran. You wouldn't want the bugger flying across the room scaring the ladies half to death.

The sporran should also be moved to an unencumbered hip when sitting down to the table. This removes the sporran from harm's way so you don't spill on it and makes your lap unencumbered for a napkin. In general, it's just considered good manners. I once observed a man sitting down to a table at a formal dinner and forgot to move his badger sporran and, surprisingly, got a startled response from the ladies at the table and when he looked down, the badger appeared to be peering over the edge of the table at the food.

