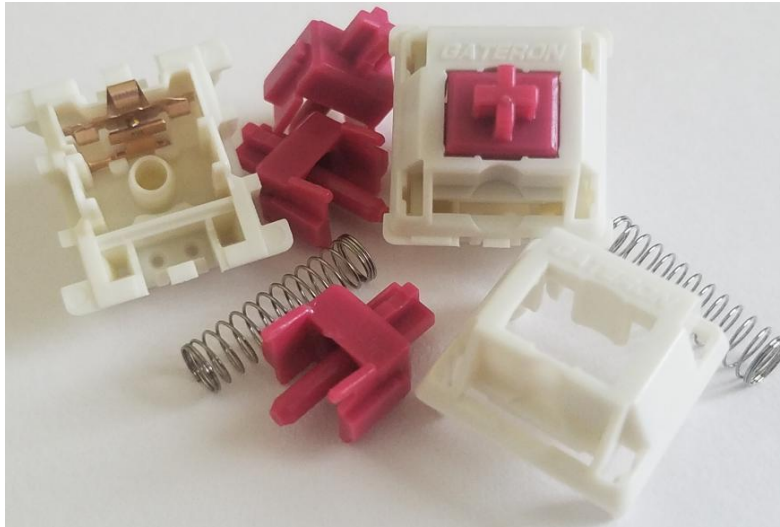


## Gateron Merlot Switch Review

-ThereminGoat, 4/14/2020

I must say that there is something poetic about finally receiving switches bearing the name ‘Merlot’ when I’ve only recently begun my new hobby in quarantine of day drinking since my professors certainly can’t tell what it is I have in an opaque water bottle. All jokes aside, I hope everyone is staying safe in lockdown and is helping flatten out the COVID-19 curve quite a bit. Hopefully we’ll be back to normal soon and I can continue staying inside drinking as if I normally went out and interacted anyhow.



**Figure 1:** Gateron Merlot switch and internal components.

### Switch Background

While Gateron Merlots are finally making their appearance into the western market via Novelkeys and IlumKB, these switches have actually been out for quite some time already. Originally making their first appearance in a ZFrontier post on December 15<sup>th</sup> of 2019, these switches were marketed



**Figure 2:** Initial in-board render of the Merlot switches found on the first ZFrontier posting.

as 60g bottom out linear switches and were aimed at being a recolor of the existing Gateron KS3 molds. While originally posted by Mellperbia, the Novekeys sales page claims that these were designed by someone of the name of 'Hang', of whom I could find no more information about. These originally ran in a private QQ groupbuy format for a month at the price of 2.4 Chinese Yuan or \$0.34 per switch.

With respect to their appearance in the western facing markets, the first site to make an announcement of their arrival was IlumKB, who had posted in their discord in February that the Merlot switches would be arriving sometime in March. However, as of the time of writing this document, these were still not available for sale on the platform. Novelkeys, on the other hand, only had mentioned in mid to late March that they would be receiving the Merlot switches, which first went on sale in the second week of April of 2020. While the original ZFrontier post had mentioned 60g as the weigh to be expected for the switches, the switches being sold on Novelkeys are listed as 45g at the point of actuation. Being that Gateron switches have never debuted a progressive spring prior, the initial 60g number likely was changed during the manufacturing/groupbuy phase in China. The Merlot switches made their appearance being sold at \$0.40 per switch on Novelkeys.

## Merlot Switch Performance

### Appearance:

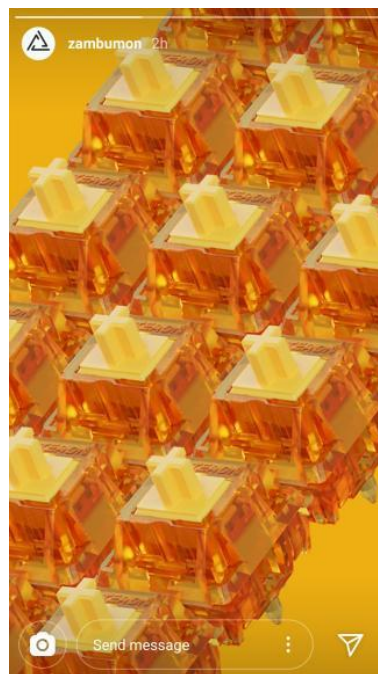
The Merlot switches are definitely among the most subtle recolors in switches in recent times, as nearly everything both made and even hinted at in terms of switches has *had* to have bright, neon, and translucent housings. (Yes Zambumon, I'm looking at you here). Featuring a mild white color for both the top and bottom housings, it does well to complement the bright maroon colored stem without overpowering the color. While the initial renders seen above intended for these to have a slightly more purple hue to them, I do really like the way that these have turned out. Rather than getting the deep color that an actual Merlot wine would give off in a glass, the color very much reminds me of how a glass of red wine in bright sunlight might take on a much more vibrant red color.

### Push Feel:

Unlike previous Gateron linear recolors, which include both Linjärs and Laserons, I was bit surprised to find that the switch to switch consistency in terms of feel of these were a bit off. While some switches had a fair amount of scratch that isn't outside of the norm of Gateron recolors, I had about 4/10 in switches have a distinctly smoother stroke to them. This is likely due to an inconsistency in factory lubing as a small amount was present, rather than a manufacturing error. Consistency aside, however, the travel of these switches are pretty nice in that they have a consistent feel throughout the spring with no pretravel or areas of differing in actuation weight. Additionally, the bottom out feel of these switches is surprisingly light given the relatively light weight of the spring and my personal preference for much higher weight linear switches.

### Sound:

Obviously, as expected from a Gateron switch with a noticeable amount of scratch, the scratch is strongly noticed in the stroke feel of the switch. I have no doubt, however, that with a proper application of a thin lube such as Krytox 205g0 or 204g0, that these will sound significantly better. While there is very little in the way of a bottoming out sound, the upstroke sound in which the stem reconnects with the top housing is quite loud and carries a bit of higher pitched 'thock' sound with the top housing.



**Figure 3:** *It's like staring into the sun.*

Additionally, worth noting, I heard very little pinging of the spring under normal operation speeds unless I held the switches directly next to my ear.

#### Wobble:

The wobble on these switches is by far the most disappointing aspect of the switches themselves. While there is a decent amount of wobble in the N/S direction that may be felt with caps on depending on the profile, there is a noticeably larger E/W wobble that I am almost sure would be felt on a full board worth of caps. What is worth mentioning, though, is that in my experience the introduction of higher weight springs tends to reduce this wobble, so if you are considering these with the intent of swapping to a more conventional linear weight, this likely won't be an issue for you.

#### Other:

While I am certain it is almost completely coincidental in nature, a 'soft finish' is a hallmark characteristic in the tasting notes for Merlot wines, and thus makes the name seem ever more fitting given the fact that the bottoming out of these switches is relatively pleasant and nice compared to other switches.

### **Comparison Notes to Other Notable Linear Switches**

*Note* – These are not aimed at being comprehensive comparisons between all factors of these switches as this would simply be too long for this writeup. These are little notes of interest I generated when comparing these pieces to Merlots side by side.



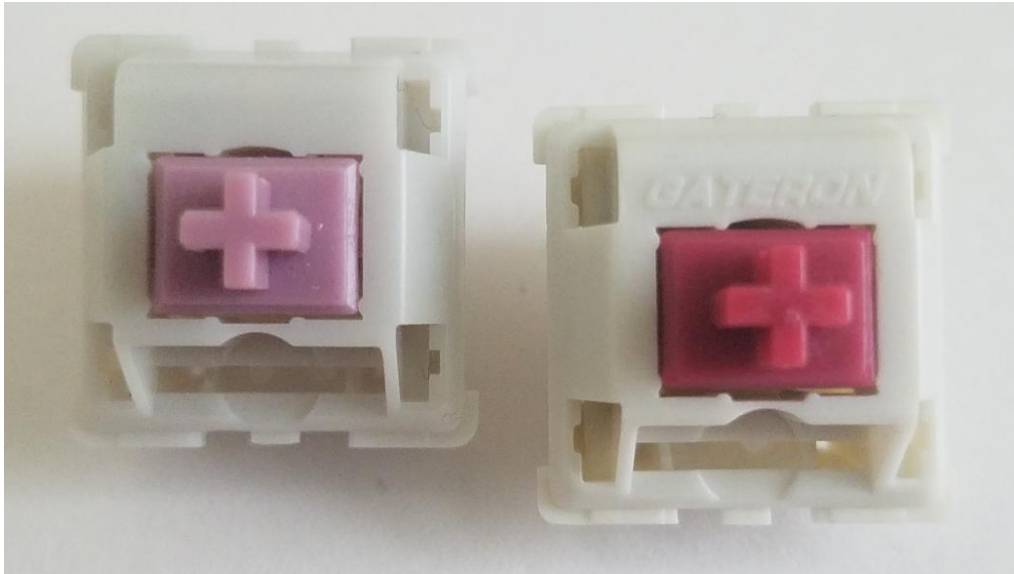
**Figure 4:** Switches used for comparison. (L-R, Top-Bottom: Tealio V2, C<sup>3</sup> Tangerine V2, Geekmaker Yellow, Linjar, Mauve, and Laseron Pink).

#### C<sup>3</sup> Tangerine V2:

- The new Tangerine V2 line still has pretty much unparalleled smoothness from their factory lubing process. They feel in a completely different league out of the box than the Gateron Merlots do.
- The upstroke sound in the Tangerines is a bit higher pitched and sharp when compared to the Merlots.
- The Merlot switches have a significantly greater amount of wobble in both directions when compared to the Tangerine V2s.

### Mauve:

- The Merlot switches definitely have an all-around lighter noise than the Mauve switches, though this is likely due to the difference in material of the housings. While I have no confirmation of this, the difference in the textures makes me believe they are.
- The Mauve switches have a comparable amount of N/S wobble but have significantly less E/W wobble.
- The actual white color of the housings of these switches is pretty close. The glossiness and smoothness of the Mauve housings, I believe, introduce a bit more of a grey tint to the color than the Merlots do.



**Figure 5:** Picture of Mauve (Left) vs. Gateron Merlot (Right)

### Tealios V2:

- While I rag on Tealios V2 for having quite a bit of scratch present in them, the Gateron Merlots do have a bit more scratch present in the stroke than the Tealios V2 do.
- Much like with the Mauves, the Tealios V2 have a decently similar N/S wobble but significantly less E/W wobble.
- While these are seemingly better overall switches than the Gateron Merlots, I would say not enough to overcome the price difference that these are still being sold at by Zeal.

### Geekmaker Creamy Light Yellow:

- The wobble of both of these switches is probably the most comparable between any pairing with Merlots on this list. As stated above, I imagine this might have something to do with these having the most similar spring weight to the Merlots.
- There appears a mildly larger bit of scratch in both feel and sound in the Geekmaker Yellow compared to the Merlots.
- For a difference in the switch housing opacity, which I often use as a rule of thumb when estimating switch sounds, these switches sound pretty damn similar.

### Linjär:

- There is a definitive ping of the spring in the Linjar switches that isn't present in the Merlots at all.
- Maybe in a bit of a counter to my earlier stance about wobble being affected by spring weight, these switches definitely do have very similar levels of wobble in both the N/S and E/W directions.
- The upstroke and bottoming out feels and sounds are much less harsh in the Merlots than the Linjärs, though this may be personal bias in action.

### Laseron Pink:

- As a completely unrelated side note, the popularity or even excitement around these switches died off so insanely fast I'm still kind of impressed.
- The Gateron Merlots definitely have a much smoother stroke and less overall friction than the Laseron switches.
- The upstroke noise on the Laseron Pinks comes across as a much more plasticky sound that isn't nearly as good on the ears as the Merlot switches.

### **Final Conclusions**

Overall, I think that these switches are not getting their fair share of recognition among the community thus far along. So far, all discussions I've seen surrounding these switches are ended with comments of 'they're just Gat Red recolors' and 'nothing special'. While I agree these are not the next line in the linear switch evolution, they definitely appear to me to be the best of the Gateron recolor line thus far along. While the quality control may also be slightly lacking as I mentioned earlier in this review, I think that the noted difference isn't going to be significantly different after aftermarket additions such as lubing, films, and/or spring swaps of these switches are made. As well, their relatively pretty housing and stem colors definitely make me think that we will see people using these more as frankenswitch fodder in order to meet a color scheme for a themed build. While these aren't anything to freak out about in terms of the market, I definitely think they are a bit better than what people have been giving them credit for – especially given their price tag.

## **Further Reading**

Original ZFrontier Merlot Groupbuy Post

Link: <https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/17834>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/17834>

Secondary ZFrontier Merlot Post

Link: <https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/20208>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/20208>

Novelkeys Merlot Sales Page

Link: <https://novelkeys.xyz/collections/switches/products/gateron-merlot-switches>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://novelkeys.xyz/collections/switches/products/gateron-merlot-switches>

(Honestly that's it – there is virtually nothing out there on these switches right now.)