



Introduction

I picked up a 1/2 inch Sorby Spindlemaster last February at the Woodworking Show in Baltimore. I wanted to see if it was more user friendly than a skew, and I thought that since it can cut coves in addition to regular skew duties that it might save on tool changes as well. A guy at the Farris Machinery booth was demonstrating it, and he let me try for a couple of minutes. It seemed to have some promise (and I think I inadvertently sold several) so I bought it. I've had a chance to use it for a while now, and so I'll tell you what I think of it.

My Spindlemaster came handled. The blade is 6 inches long and 0.512 inches wide. The handle is 10 1/4 inches, for a total length of 16 1/4 inches. It weighs about 8 ounces. By way of comparison, my 1/2 inch rolled edge skew weighs about 10 ounces although the handle is 2 inches shorter. The Spindlemaster is not quite semi-circular in cross section. The edges have a small flat, and while the bottom is rounded, the Spindlemaster is only 0.190 inches thick, not the 0.256 inches it would be if it were semi-circular.

The tip isn't quite semi-circular either (and you want to pay attention to this when you sharpen it), it's more like a V tip

with a rounded tip and a slight curve to the edge. Figure 1 is a scan of the tip from the top bottom.



The tip of the Spindlemaster from top and bottom.

Sharpening

You don't need fancy jigs to sharpen the Spindlemaster, regardless of your choice of sharpeners. If you're using an ordinary bench grinder, shown in Figure 2, just put the end of the handle in the V-Block and adjust the length of the arm so that the bevel at the tip matches. All you need to do is roll the tool from side to side. Just be careful to maintain the rounded Vee shape, don't change it into a semi-circle, and keep the sharpening angle at the tip at about 30 degrees.



Figure 2: Sharpening the Spindlemaster with a bench grinder and sliding V-block.

If you use a Tormek, as in Figure 3, I recommend that you move the Universal Support to the horizontal position so that you can have the wheel turning away from the edge. Use the SVS-40 jig slid all the way to the ferule, and adjust the position of the Universal Support so that the bevel matches at the tip, then roll the tool from side to side.

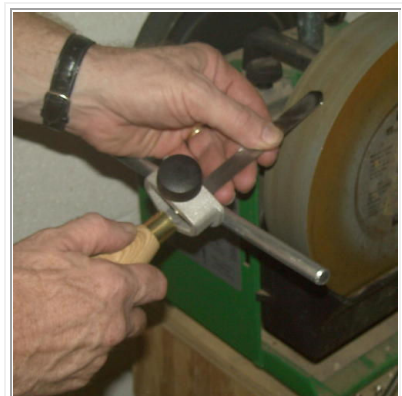


Figure 3: Sharpening the Spindlemaster with the Tormek.

If you use a Tormekized Makita wet grinder, as in Figure 4, you can use the ferule as the jig. Adjust the SLR so that the bevel matches at the tip and again just roll the toll from side to side.



Figure 4: Sharpening the Spindlemaster with a modified Makita wet grinder featured in the February, March and April issues of More Woodturning and the authors web site.

Regardless of which sharpening system you use, the Spindlemaster will benefit from honing after grinding. It is particularly important to hone if you're using a bench grinder as you can hone away any deposited burr on top as well as refining the edge.

Roughing

Like a skew, the Spindlemaster is capable of roughing small pieces from square to round, and you can do it more or less the same way in sort of a scooping motion, as in Figure 5. Richard Raffan and Mike Darlow explain this type of cut far better than I could even if there was room. I was unable to take a roughing heavy planning

cut like I can with a skew. Because the cutting edge curves away from the wood you can't bring as much of it bear. You can take a riving cut with the tip of the tool, as in Figure 6, but the surface left is horrible and having long pieces of wood beating against the tool rest is a bit disconcerting.



Figure 5: Taking a roughing cut on a 1 inch turning square with the Spindlemaster.



Figure 6: Taking a riving roughing cut with the Spindlemaster.

The Spindlemaster isn't as comfortable to use as a skew for roughing. Due to the thinner

cross section you can feel the blade flex during heavy cuts (rather as heavy a cut as it's capable of). I tried shaping a 1/2 inch HSS drill blank to more or less match the profile of the spindlemaster to see if the greater cross section would be more stable. I cut the last inch or so of the blank to a semi-circular cross section and sharpened it the same way. It did feel more stable, but without the edges it was more prone to catches on beads and coves. The Spindlemaster might benefit from being shortened to 3 or 4 inches of blade length, but I haven't tried it.

Finish Planing

Planing cuts, as in figure 7, are probably what the Spindlemaster was designed for. It's easy enough, put the bevel on the wood and rotate the tool until it begins to cut. It leaves a good surface, perhaps a bit more burnished than a skew. As there is no long point, and the point of support is pretty close to being under the cut, there's not much likelihood of a catch. You can easily achieve the optimal 45 degree rake angle without angling the tool.



Figure 7: Taking a fine planing cut with the Spindlemaster. Note the fine shavings piling up on the authors hand.

Of course there is no free lunch. The prices you pay for catchless planing are that the Spindlemaster won't easily take as heavy a cut, and you'll be more prone to unintended ripples.

Planing a swell, as in Figure 8, is much the same as planing. The same benefits and debits apply. The finish I got off the tool on some oak, with the heavy burnishing, was impressive.



Figure 8: Planing a swell with the Spindlemaster. You may be able to see the burnishing left by the tool even with newspaper reproduction.

V Cuts

I found two ways to make a V cut with the Spindlemaster. The first way, which I remembered from the Farris demonstrator, more or less mimics V cutting with a skew, with the tool rotating down into the wood from above, as shown in Figure 9. There is no long point though and you cannot try to cut with the tip. You have to cut with the edge behind the point, with the flat side of the tool facing the center of the bead. If you do let the nose touch, the tool will dance away from where you're trying to cut, leaving a nice spiral behind itself. V cutting doesn't go as quickly as it does with a skew as you can't cut as deeply on each cut, and you have to flip the tool over as you switch sides of the V. I found it hard to avoid spiral catches

when trying to work quickly, although practice would probably improve that.

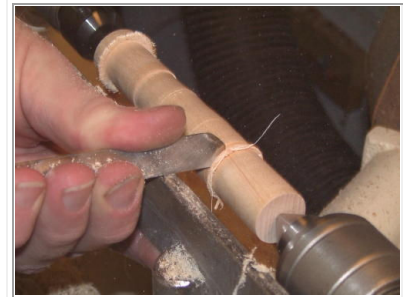


Figure 9: Cutting a V with the Spindlemaster. Note that the bottom edge, not the nose, is cutting.

You can also do a V cut with the Spindlemaster by raising the handle until the tool is almost straight across, with the nose pointing straight into the wood, then plunging it in, as in Figure 10. The flat side of the tool should face the inside of the V, and the bevel should be parallel with the side of the V. I found this method a little less catch prone, but it's still slower than the results with a skew.



Figure 10: Plunge cutting a V with the Spindlemaster.

End Facing

End facing is really just a steep V cut. Again I had better results plunge cutting, as in Figure 11 and 12. In addition to being less spiral catch prone it was easier to keep the sides perpendicular this way.



Figure 11: Plunge cutting end grain with the Spindlemaster.



Figure 12: Plunge cutting end grain seen from above.

Rolling Beads

In bead cutting, like planning, the lack of a long point and the curved cutting surface of the Spindlemaster reduce the likelihood of a catch. You just present the tool to the top of the bead, rotate it until it starts to cut, and then continue the

rotation down to the bottom of the V, as in Figures 13 and 14. Of course you may have to take multiple cuts for large beads. It behaves nicely for beads.



Figure 13: Rolling a bead with the Spindlemaster.



Figure 14: Rolling a bead seen from above.

Cutting Coves

The Spindlemaster cuts coves in much the same manner as a spindle gouge. Two views of this are shown in Figures 15 and 16. In fact, I have the same weakness of being prone to spiral catches on the left side of the cove, probably because I don't move far enough over to angle the presentation of the tool enough. The Spindlemaster is okay on coves. I can't cut as

confidently or as small a cove as with a spindle gouge, but practice would probably improve that.



Figure 15: Cutting a cove with the Spindlemaster.



Figure 16: Cutting a cove seen from above.

Recommendations

Inexperienced user

To get another viewpoint on the Spindlemaster, I had my son and photographer Matt try the tool briefly. Matt is 15 and has done a little turning, mostly with a roughing gouge and spindle gouge. He was able to do a planning cut without difficulty. He did fine on beads. He had a few spiral catches trying some of the other cuts. I also let him try a skew for the first time. He said he preferred the skew for planning (although

he didn't have a major catch to influence his decision) and V cuts. He thought it about the same for beads, although I thought he was having trouble cutting a bead with the skew.

Ben & Jerry's

The Spindlemaster does work. It does reduce the likelihood of catches for planning and beading cuts, and you can cut a cove with it. However, these benefits come at a price. No long point means no long point to catch, but it also really reduces the ability to do V cuts. The effectively curved cutting surface also cuts down on catches, particularly when rolling beads, but it also reduces the Spindlemaster's ability to do heavier cuts.

I recommend you look for another way to avoid catches. The 1/2 inch Spindlemaster costs about \$40 at Woodcrafts. Instead of buying it, spend \$25 to buy Mike Darlow's Fundamentals of Woodturning. Read the book. Then go to the grocery and spend the other \$15 on some Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Around here you could get 6 pints for \$15 when it's on sale. Hide it at the back of the freezer, in an empty hog jowls container if necessary. Then every time you actually practice the exercises in the book for a half hour reward yourself with a bowl of ice cream. Or reward yourself with a pint if necessary, you know your price better than I do. The Spindlemaster isn't a bad tool.

But it's not a miracle. In the long run you'll be better off mastering the skew. And this comes from a self-confessed tool freak.

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