

Turn a cheap shave into a peak performer

You'll never regret spending the money for a quality spokeshave. But if you already have an inexpensive one or you can't resist a flea-market bargain, there are a couple of ways to tune them up to perform like their costlier cousins. Start by buying a thicker, after-market blade in high-carbon steel, and spend some time sharpening it until both surfaces making the edge are fairly polished.

The typical lower-priced metal shave has a wide throat that looks ready to take a chunk worthy of a drawknife. To correct this, you'll need to make a shim that fits between the frog and blade and closes the throat. Use a dense wood like maple. If your shave has the two blade-adjusting screws, the shim shouldn't be so thick that the blade no longer engages these screws. I find that a maximum throat opening of 0.020 in. allows for a reasonably thick shaving while still cutting cleanly and without chatter. (I like a throat opening of 0.005 in. to 0.008 in. for a wooden-bodied shave.)

While you are working on the throat clearance, inspect the frog and correct any problems you find there. Often the paint used on the body of the shave has gotten onto the frog's surface, even collecting in a fat sag. Carefully scrape down to the metal and then check the surface for flatness. A little judicious filing may be in order. Careful: Don't nick the front edge of the throat or you'll be left with an irregular mouth opening. If the frog doesn't register the blade square to the sole, correct that too by filing. Then you can calculate the thickness of shim needed to create the proper throat.



Body and sole. Scrape away any surplus paint and then check the surface for flatness and whether the blade registers square to the sole. A little judicious filing (left) will correct either problem, but be careful not to nick the front edge of the throat. Budget spokeshaves often come with coarse scratches on the sole. Use a file to remove these and flatten the sole at the same time (right).



Smooth the chipbreaker. Rough casting and paint prevent many chipbreakers from making good contact with the blade. File down to flat metal (left). Bevel the leading edge (right) to create a tight joint with the blade, which keeps shavings from getting caught under the chipbreaker.



Close the throat. Make a dense hardwood shim (left) that fits between the frog and blade. The shim shouldn't be so thick that the blade no longer engages the adjustment screws. The tighter throat (right) makes for much smoother cuts.