

Game changing chisels

The Axminster Rider chisel range aims to change the game for affordable quality tools, and if the sets tested here are anything to go by then this is a very exciting prospect indeed

The market is awash with chisels so it must be a bit of a gamble for anyone to launch a new range, especially into the lower end of the market – you certainly need to have a product that stands out from the rest. If attention to detail sells, then the nicely finished box these chisels are supplied in gives a decent indication of what lies beneath, and on opening the box the first impression of the overall look of the chisels doesn't disappoint.

Different options

As part of Axminster's own brand 'Rider' range, these certainly have the accolade of standing out and there are three sets of chisels available, two of which I have on the GW test bench. If you are more at home hitting your chisels with a hammer, or spend time out on site where it isn't practical to carry a mallet, then there is also a set of plastic-handled ones available. But for bench work, it's always nice to have a set of wooden-handled chisels, so I've opted for these as test subjects.

The chisels can be bought individually as well, with prices from just over £8-12 each, which isn't a lot of money for a chisel that is as finely made as these are.

So starting with the business end, the blades are made from chrome manganese steel, which is a low alloy, high carbon tool steel that is specially tempered to give consistent characteristics, and is ideally suited to edge tools.

The steel is hardened to Rockwell 59c, which is a good halfway house for durability of the edge without being too hard on the stone, and in that respect, using my old faithful Trend diamond stone you can feel the 'bite' as you work them but without abrading too readily.

Prepping & flatness

Prepping was minimal on the test chisels; I made a couple of initial passes on the flat backs to see just how flat they were and how much effort would be needed to get them ready. While I often read on forums about how 'it only took an hour or so to polish the back of each one', if I was in that situation with a new tool, then I'd be putting it back in the post as they should need only a couple of minutes' work at most to get them in the right area for honing. There was no need to call the postman back,



however, as these showed a very slight hollow behind the cutting edge, which is always a bonus as there's less work required to get the all-important front edge in check. If the flatness is important, then equally so is how good they are for finer work and cheaper bevel edges are often 'walked past' a surface grinder to give a cursory bevel that is too thick on the lands for any finer work into tight corners; often little more than a firmer chisel with the corners knocked off.

However, the Rider chisels are very well ground in this area with uniform fine lands coming in at 1mm-thick, so they will be well suited to finer joinery, dovetailing and the like, and this is consistent across the whole set of chisels in both styles.

Handles

Moving to the handles, hornbeam is the favoured species of European chisel manufacturers as well as premium chisel makers Lie-Nielsen, so no bad thing to see the same material used here. It's a very durable timber that takes repeated striking without problem so is well suited for handles that will be struck by a mallet, as is the case with these bench chisels.

This set has a cigar-like shape akin to traditional wooden-handled chisels while a more bulbous stubbier handle is fitted to the butt chisels to aid palm pushing work. A small flat on the underside of the butt handles is a nice touch, which stops them rolling around.

Equally, the use of a slightly smaller diameter handle on the narrower bench chisels gives them a more delicate feel in the hand, which fits in well for the finer work the narrower chisels tend to be employed in.

Axminster state that these handles have a light oil finish, which must be incredibly light as these look and feel unfinished and look like they will pick up dirt and sweat quite easily, so a couple of coats of your own preferred finish might be a good idea to preserve them.

Conclusion

A stainless steel ferrule with a leather washer to absorb impact blows is common across both sets, which helps to give them a very sleek and professional look and it's this excellent attention to detail from handle to blade that helps these chisels to look more expensive than the more entry level price band they're selling at. These are well worth considering if your budget is limited but you want excellent quality nonetheless. **GW**

Specification:

- ▶ **Steel:** Chrome manganese
- ▶ **Sets available:** Hornbeam-handled butt and bench, plus plastic-handled site versions
- ▶ **Sizes:** From 6-50mm depending on the range. Axminster recommend a 30° secondary bevel on their chisels

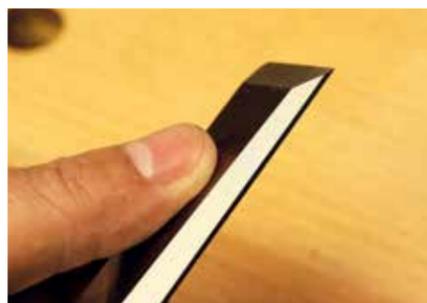
- ▶ **Web:** www.axminster.co.uk



The same test on harder beech gives an indication of how the edge is capable of doing a fine job



The leather washer and stainless ferrule is common across both styles of chisel



Equally, the 1mm-thick consistent lands are identical on all chisels



The butt chisels have a small flat on the underside of the handle...



... which helps to keep it from rolling off the bench in use



Checking the chisels for flatness was done using my faithful Trend diamond stone



Little work was needed as they showed a marginal hollow for fast honing



Testing on end-grain pine is usually a good indicator of a keen, consistent edge



The butt chisels are great for controlled driving with the palm

THE GW VERDICT

▶ **PROS:**
Fine, consistent lands; takes a good edge; butt and bench options

CONS:
▶ Handles seem to lack finish

▶ **RATING:** 4.5 out of 5



And are equally controllable for finer paring work

READER GROUP TEST

Welcome to our **reader group test** by members of our very own Woodworker's Institute Forum

Rider bevel edge chisels

Rider bevel edge chisels are claimed to have fine grain, chrome manganese steel blades hardened and tempered to 59 HRC, and lightly oiled hornbeam handles. The larger chisels have deliberately larger handles to suit their sizes. There is a leather shock-absorbing washer between the handle and the bolster. The blades are slimmer than standard chisels and ground with a narrow edge on each side so the blade can get into confined joint spaces, such as dovetailing.

Six-piece bevel edge chisel set 6, 10, 12, 16, 20, 25mm £96.32
Contact: www.axminster.co.uk



PHOTOGRAPH BY GMC/ANTHONY BAILEY

What the testers had to say

Chris Roberts
I currently have a set of Irwin chisels. I can get a reasonable edge on them, but not brilliant. I want a chisel that is easy to sharpen and keeps a good edge while being comfortable to use.

The chisels are beautifully presented in a stained and varnished plywood box with a discreet Rider logo towards one corner of the lid.

They come with a primary bevel, so they need to be given a secondary bevel before use. Fortunately, I already had an Axminster Rider Sharpening Station. A little bit of work flattened the back of the blade at the sharp end of



Chris Roberts managed to get his sharpest edge yet

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHRIS ROBERTS

the chisel. Then I fitted the chisel into the honing guide.

A few strokes created a secondary bevel, then a few more on the strop and it was the sharpest I have ever been able to get a chisel. I was delighted.

In use the chisels were very comfortable, the hardwood handles smooth with a light oil finish. They felt secure and cut extremely well. It is an excellent set but I might have to add a 3mm chisel to it. I would highly recommend them.

Nick Pike

I currently own a set of Stanley chisels and am pleased with them. I was fortunate enough to buy them in a sale just before attending a beginner's woodwork course with Chris Tribe and I was shown how to prepare and sharpen them. I don't use them every day but I find the edges last a reasonable time. I am in the habit of sharpening them before I do anything critical.

I want a chisel that does not require a lot of preparation to get a good edge, i.e. the back is flat and there aren't too many grinding marks to polish out. Another rather obvious requirement is that chisels should hold a sharp edge for a reasonable time.

The backs were reasonably flat and

the manufacturing grind marks did not take too much effort to remove. One chisel took a little longer but nothing serious. The handles are not treated at all – well made and comfortable. In hindsight, I would give them some form of protection before I started using them.

They are expensive – you can get a set of six Narex chisels, same sizes in a wooden box, for £75. I mention these because I go to a woodwork evening class and the tutor uses Narex.



Nick Pike found blade preparation was quick

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NICK PIKE

Below and right: Steve Dunning enjoyed using the chisels



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF STEVE DUNNING

Steve Dunning

I currently own a set of branded bevel edged chisels. They keep a reasonable cutting edge but it really depends on the timber I am using at the time. I look first for build quality and comfort when using, and then cost. I thought the product was nicely presented, the build quality was impressive and the chisels were comfy to use and felt robust.

I followed standard advice and did the final sharpening at 30°, which gave a very good edge. These chisels seemed to keep the edge for a considerable time. I would certainly recommend these chisels to anyone looking for a very good quality set of chisels at what I consider a very fair price.

Paul Ward

I own a set of Narex cabinetmakers' chisels, which keep a good cutting edge. I look for a well-balanced chisel with quality steel that holds a good edge and a wooden handle that is comfortable to use in the hand.

The chisels were easy to use and I easily polished up the backs to get



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF PAUL WARD



a razor sharp edge. The balance is good although I would have preferred a slightly chunkier handle and thought the handles should all be the same size. The 6, 10 and 12mm have less girth than the 25, 20 and 16mm chisels.

These chisels performed well on the ash and sapele half-blind dovetails, easily getting in to those hard-to-reach corners. The Rider chisels represent good value for money and are worth considering if your budget is limited while still looking for quality.



Paul Ward used his set for clean dovetailing

Editor's comment:

Rider is Axminster's own premium brand and it has sourced what it believes are good quality, good value tools. I found these chisels performed well after some initial preparation, which I would expect with any new blades. I can let you into a secret – once a chisel manufacturer has developed the right steel alloy it will stay the same for all of its blade manufacturing. It is the handles and the presentation that may be changed. So you can be assured these are made of very good steel and the hornbeam handles are a nice European touch.



Anthony Bailey

Barry Edge

I currently own a set of Faithfull chisels but they don't really keep a good cutting edge, so I'm looking for a set that keeps a good, clean cutting edge and stay sharp for longer.

There was no problem with the Rider chisels. They were nice and light to handle and they kept a nice cutting edge. I would recommend these chisels – very good value for money and a very professional finish. ■



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BARRY EDGE

Barry Edge found the Rider chisels to be superior quality

How our testers rated the product

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|---|--------|
| How would you rate the product performance? | 8.2/10 |
| How would you rate the product ease of use? | 9/10 |
| How would you rate the product overall? | 8.8/10 |

If you would like to be part of our panel of product testers, please go to our website www.woodworkersinsitute.com – and SIGN UP NOW!