

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



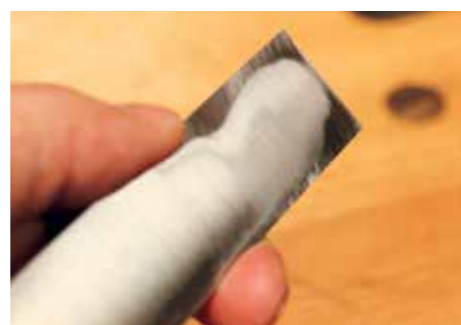
The butt chisels have a small flat on the underside of the handle...



... 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