

## Veritas Skew Rabbet Plane

Copyright 2010. This article originally appeared in the [Fine Tool Journal](#)

---

***A couple quick adjustments make this tool one of the finest metal rabbeting planes ever made.***



I've always been curious about the Stanley No. 78 Duplex Fillister and Rabbet Plane. Actually, I've been curious as to why it was such a popular tool.

Its fence wobbles like a see-saw, its straight cutter does a poor job of cutting across the grain, and its blade adjuster (if it has one) is as jerky as Andrew Dice Clay. After working with a No. 78 for years, I concluded that it does its best work in softwoods that are going to be painted and displayed in dimly lit rooms.

So I banished my No. 78 to the bottom of my toolbox and bought a wooden-bodied moving fillister plane with a skewed cutter, a robust fence and a furniture-making pedigree. Wooden moving fillisters, however, have their own set of problems. Setting the fence parallel requires care, the wooden bodies can warp, and shaving ejection isn't great.

In the summer of 2008, Veritas introduced its Skew Rabbet Plane and I have used it to make hundreds of rabbets for furniture projects during the last 11 months. Despite some minor quibbles and modifications, it is, hands-down, the best moving fillister plane I've used.

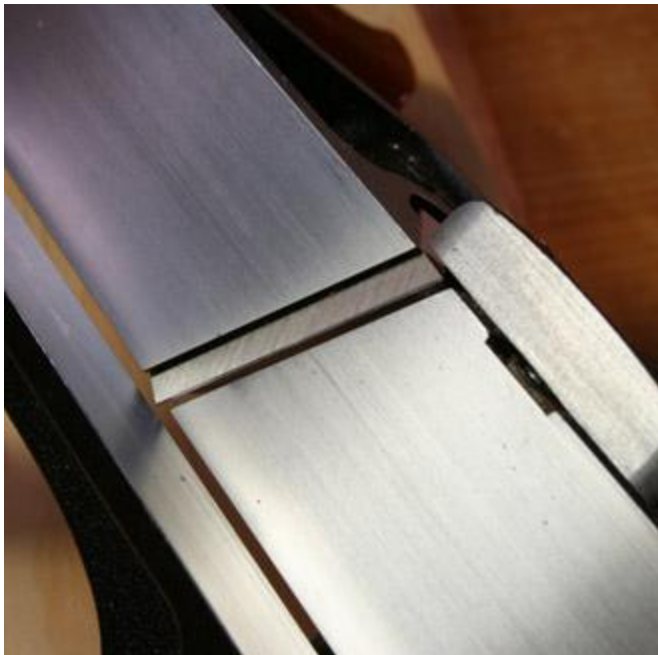
So here are the reasons you should buy this plane for your shop and what you should do to it before you put it to work.

### **Built for Real Furniture-making**



The Veritas Skew Rabbet has its A2 cutter skewed at 30° in the mouth of the tool, with a fairly generous 1/16" aperture for passing shavings. The skew is what makes this plane work so well in hardwoods.

Fillister planes are designed for rabbeting across the grain as well as with the grain, such as when you need to cut a rabbet on all four edges of a panel. Rabbet planes with a straight cutter do a fine job when cutting parallel to the grain, but they leave a rotten surface behind when cutting across the grain.



The skewed cutter fixes this problem. When you are cutting across the grain, there is enough skew that the shearing action of the blade produces a finished surface that is quite acceptable – in some woods it looks as good as a cut that is parallel to the grain. This is an enormous time-saver when making raised panels because you don't have to clean up the work left by the plane.

The skewed cutter has other advantages as well. Its shearing action helps pull the tool's fence to the edge of the board, which reduces the chance that the tool will wander away from the edge.

Also, the skewed cutter produces a spiral shaving that clears the mouth and the fence with ease. Unlike a typical metal plow plane, for example, this fillister plane never gets its escapement jammed with shavings.

I have found shaving ejection to be superior to that in a wooden moving fillister plane – in those tools the skewed cutter pushes the shaving against a wedge that deflects the shavings out the escapement. Usually.

The skewed mouth is an asset to furniture-makers who work in hardwoods. You'll get less tearing when working across the grain and less clogging thanks to the spiral shavings.

### **The Fine Adjustments**

With any fillister plane, the hardest part of the tool is the set-up. And the Veritas Skew Rabbet is no exception. However, the Canadian company's engineers have improved many of the adjustments of the tool so it is easier to dial in the settings you need. Here are some highlights.

For a fillister plane to work, the cutter has to be a hair proud of the side of the plane's body, otherwise it will cut a slanted rabbet. Setting the blade slightly proud can be a trick without pivoting the blade. Pivoting the cutter will produce a shaving that is tapered in thickness.

To help you set the blade correctly, Veritas has added two set screws at the side of the cutter that will allow you to get the iron right where you want it. The theory is that once you get them set, it will be easy to return to your setting after your resharpen the blade. Just set the blade against the setscrews and you're off to the races. In reality, these screws tend to move a little in service and back off from the blade. I don't consider this a big deal – you just screw them in a bit so they touch the blade before you remove the iron for resharpening.



Use these set screws to adjust the position of the blade in relation to the side of the plane. Before you resharpen the cutter, snug the screws up against the blade again. They tend to work a little loose.

After you get the cutter set so it's a little proud of the plane, you need to set the nicker (sometimes called a "scoring cutter") so it's a shade proud of the blade. The Veritas's nicker is three kinds of clever. It's circular, which makes it easy to sharpen. It's mounted on an eccentric post, so it's easy to swing it out of the way when you don't need it. And it's adjustable in and out thanks to a screw buried under a fence's post.

The first time you adjust the nicker it seems like a lot of trouble. But you get used to it very quickly and I came to appreciate how precise and robust the mechanism is. To lower the nicker so it cuts, you loosen a locking screw on the escapement side of the plane. Then you turn the screw in the center of the nicker and it swings down. Tighten the locking screw and you are done with that adjustment.

If you need to move the nicker in or out from the side of the plane, unscrew the front fence post. At the bottom of the post's hole there is a screw there. If you loosen the locking screw and then turn the screw at the bottom of the fence hole you can move the nicker in or out.



The screw at the bottom of the fence post's hole allows you to adjust the nicker in or out in relation to the side of the plane.

### **Other Adjustments**

The blade-feed mechanism is superior to anything I've ever used on a fillister plane. It's a simple screw-feed mechanism, but it beats the pants off of Stanley's awkward lever or the tap-tapping of a wooden moving fillister.

Also, the depth stop on this tool is quite good. It's modeled after the robust one on the Stanley and doesn't tend to slip like the depth stop on Veritas's small plow plane, which is mounted on a round post.

### **The Fence: The Good and the Not-so-good**

The fence is, overall, an excellent piece of work. The plane has two fence posts, so the fence doesn't shake and wobble like the Stanley's.

The fence grabs onto the two posts with a locking collet system, much like the one on an electric router. This makes the fence easy to set parallel to the side of the plane's body.

However, despite these collets, the fence on my tool tended to slip a little at times, and my rabbets would end up being wider than I intended. Part of this problem is, I admit, how I hold the plane. But I'll come back to that problem in a moment.

No matter what the fence shouldn't slip, and so I spent some time trying to tighten things up. First I cleaned off the collets and rods of any oil left over from manufacturing. This helped. Then I roughed up the rods with #120-grit sandpaper. This solved the problem and the fence hasn't slipped since.



Rough up the posts with sandpaper to prevent the fence from ever slipping.

My only other quibble with the tool is its nicely turned front knob. I don't think it's necessary. The typical grip with a fenced plane such as this is to grasp the fence with your off hand. This grip helps push the fence against the work. When I used the plane with the front knob, I tended to tip the tool left, even after some practice. So I removed the front knob. I am certain that having my left hand pressing the fence contributes to the fence slipping, but I honestly think it's the best way to hold the tool.



Here's the best grip for a fenced plane. The fingers of your off hand press the fence to the work. Your thumb presses the tool down in front of the mouth. This grip offer tremendous control.

### **Details and Doubling Up?**

Overall, the tool is a remarkable amount of engineering. The fit and finish of the tool's ductile castings are A-plus work. The knurling on its knobs is crisp. The iron – like all Veritas irons – has been lapped on its unbeveled face so it's a snap to set up and sharpen. The tool is comfortable to hold – the rear tote and blade adjuster are placed for a perfect four-finger grip.

With all that, the only question is if you need to buy both the right-hand version and the left-hand version of the tool. My recommendation is to buy only one tool. If you are right-handed, buy the right-hand tool.

Though having both tools will allow you to deal with all grain-direction situations, that's only a real issue when you are making raised panels for doors. If you keep the iron sharp and set it for a light cut, you usually can get away with just one plane.

The Veritas Skew Rabbet Plane is \$249 (you can buy the pair with a modest discount). I highly recommend this fine tool.

Christopher Schwarz is the editor of Popular Woodworking and Woodworking Magazine. His latest book, "Handplane Essentials" is available from his web site at [LostArtPress.com](http://LostArtPress.com).

Using the Veritas Skew Rabbet Plane:

Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=159&v=QUTN5nzH-FE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=159&v=QUTN5nzH-FE)

Set fence > Set depth stop > flush workpiece to the edge of your workbench > start cross grain > score the line with the nicker or cutting gauge several times > take heavy cut (as much as you can...mouth won't clog on cross grain) > Then cut long grain (no need to score the grain with the nicker) > if a show surface shows tear out, then clean it with a shoulder plane

---

From Bill Anderson:

Cutting lengthwise with the grain will not necessarily tell you if it is set up correctly. That's the can't-get-it-wrong-cut!

I would say that the things to look for are in the following order:

1. **Align cutter and nicker.** check that the right edge of the cutter is ever so slightly inside of the nicker. The best way to do this is to set the nicker deep, draw back on the plane to make a good scribe mark, then take one pass partway down the length of the board. Stop and look carefully to see if the shaving is in fact just inside or so close to the scribe line.
2. **Depth of cutter.** you may be taking too heavy of a shaving. Generally speaking you can run the plane heavy cross grain (you are rolling up fibers rather than shaving) but when you switch to long grain, you generally need to pull back on the iron to not have too heavy a cut. You want the cut to be as minimal as possible to still get the job done. No shortcuts here.
3. **The iron is not square across the sole of the plane.** On skewed planes, it is difficult to set the iron square (even projection) across the width. Generally the approach is to tweak squareness by tilting the iron with the adjustment screws (the approach Veritas uses I think). You can only do that so far before you tilt the right corner of the iron up and away from the edge of the plane or down and into the sole, depending on which direction you need to tilt. So the bottom line is that you pretty much need the iron to have the exact right skew from the get go. I would try to evaluate this by planing some poplar, focus on holding the plane vertical and see how wide the shaving are and if they are the same thickness across the width (hold them up to the light).
4. **It's the Wood.** The SYP has a lot of variation between early and late wood. Very big difference in wood hardness. I would do my tests with poplar as it is a good test wood. There will be a difference in the quality of the shaving depending on whether the board is flat sawn or quartersawn or whether the grain lines vary across its width (a board from just outside of the range of the pith for example).

If Chris did a video, I bet he did not grab a piece of wood from the top of the pile. He probably chose the piece very carefully. Also, how many takes did he do? (unknown). It's no mistake that demonstrators get perfect gossamer shavings right off the bat. Not like us hoi poloi!

I have a Stanley 289 which is the equivalent of the No. 78 but skewed. Tapping the iron is a matter of hammer adjustment since the sides of the iron are easily accessed. I have struggled with getting the skew just right, and I think this is where you need to focus.

---

Josh: I looked at the video and it seems as though Chris is using straight grained quarter sawn oak as his stock--really the best choice for a good cut. You noted that your shoulders were badly torn up and that is diagnostic of the cutter (left edge of the plane iron) being proud of the nicker. A couple of other things about the video:

1. On the first cross grain cut, Chris does not have the stock hanging over the edge of the bench. On the second cut he is more careful to flush up the edge of the stock with the edge of the bench. In reality, you want toe stock to overhand the bench sides just a bit so that the fence of the plane determines the width of the rabbet, not the edge of the bench.
2. Notice how many times Chris scribes the end grain with backwards cuts before he cuts a shaving? At least three times. Overkill IMHO, and probably indicates latent OCD on his part!
3. Chris says to use a heavy cut on the cross grain. The reality is that you can use a heavier cut cross grain, but too heavy of a cut is counter productive, especially on SYP or woods with a lot of difference between early and late woods. I find it better to lighten up a bit, go for the quality of the cut and maybe take a few extra passes to get the job done. Depends a lot on what wood you are working.
4. You only need to use a shoulder plane to clean up the cut if it is a number one cut (i.e., you will look at it for the rest of your life). Again, OCD. OTOH, I do not like to trust my moving fillester depth or fence so I usually scribe my rabbets with a gauge, rough then with the fillester and take then to the gauge lines with the shoulder plane. If you are going to take the time to set your fillester accurately, then you may as well trust your settings.