

Perpetual Novice, September, 2017 Issue

By Don Michael

When I got home this afternoon, I started doing a little (very little) clean-up in the shop, putting away screwdrivers, tape measures, etc. and putting scraps in the shorts bins (already full and I haven't done anything – I'm going to have to define "shorts" as >1'L and the rest as "kindling"). Then I noticed a pile of push sticks that I had started 2-3 months ago when I chewed up my last one. I had had a resaw blade on the band saw and, of course, couldn't make the curves of this particular North Bennett Street School (over-)design, so I'd roughed them out and set them aside.

I pulled off the ½" resaw blade and failed to figure out how to triple-loop it for storage - again (seems like I have to run to the video each time – the technique just refuses to stick in my memory). I installed a ¼" blade and proceeded to refine the push sticks. I couldn't help but notice that the cutting was extremely slow and it was burning the ¾" plywood to beat the band! I'm thinking, as I go to the next push stick, "The blade can't be dull. It's almost new and worked last time I used it." "Maybe too many teeth per inch?" "Gee, it's burning just as much in a straight cut as in a curve, what the heck?"

I stopped and inspected the blade carefully. That's an odd tooth shape, almost rectangular! I know I didn't hit any metal but it looks like the top of each tooth is sheared off and I can feel a sort of burr. I started scratching at it with a fingernail and noticed tiny black or dark brown chips coming off, and wherever I did that, lo and behold the tooth was now normal shape! It was char stuck to the teeth and in the gullets. My first thought was, "This'll be a pain to manually clean 105 inches of blade; is the blade worth the trouble?"

Then I saw it. It took a moment to understand how/why, but it quickly became clear. When I unravelled the blade from 3 loops (storage) to one, it had ended up inside out, or is it upside down? Which is what in a loop? When I mounted it in the saw, it was travelling backwards, coming down with the teeth pointed upward! I had invented a new form of scratch stock; well, almost. It reminded me of a phrase I first learned in the Navy. "Nothing is fool-proof because fools are so ingenious."

I removed and reinstalled the blade correctly and, to no surprise, it cut through the plywood like butter with no burning at all. It even cleaned all the char bits from the teeth and turned corners very nicely. It doesn't seem like I tempered the steel, but then again these push sticks aren't much of a challenge for the blade. These blades from Highland Hardware are pretty resilient.

Enuff's enuff, and I've had enuff for one night. I'm going to bed. Maybe tomorrow I'll see if I can make a straight cut with the back side of a tenon saw. At least I'd be using a consistent approach!

