Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by Geocyclist - 02 Nov 2012 20:03

I am curious about who steels or strops finished edges. By finished I mean an edge that is completely finished off a WEPS, then used, slightly dulled but not trashed, then using steels or strops to touch it up, mainly to straighten the edge as opposed to "sharpening" where sharpening means to remove material by abrasive action and reform the edge. By my definition a slightly dull knife can be brought back almost to the level of sharpness by steeling or stropping. A truly dull knife must be "sharpened" with stones to become sharp again.

I steel my kitchen knives. I steel every time I use a kitchen knife. I can feel the slightly deformed/rolled edge after use, it feels like a burr. After steeling I can tell it's gone.

My EDC pocket knives I stropp after use. This has the same affect for me as steeling and also touches the edge up a bit from the abrasive action.

I don't claim that steeling or stropping gets the edge back 100% as good as it was. I compare it to car maintenance. If you spend a little care often the engine lasts a long time (it still degrades a little bit over time), compared to doing no maintenance then replacing the entire engine later on after it dies. So I would rather spend a little time steeling/stropping and get the edge to 99% rather than letting it go and having to spend a lot of time sharpening it back into shape.

@ Clay, have you thought about making steels for the WEPS? You could have 1 side smooth steel and the other with fine ribs. Do think anyone would use them or do people just strop for small touch ups?

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by cbwx34 - 03 Nov 2012 08:38

My maintenance lately is similar to yours... lately I've been testing using a smooth steel on the Henckel kitchen knives I've been using with good results. I used to be in the camp that steeling didn't really do anything, but now I think it depends on the knife and finish... and on these particular knives, with a semi-fine finish (around a 600-800g WE diamond), I find a noticeable difference if I steel right before use. (I'll sometimes cut a bit, steel, and cut more just to test this).

I've also been maintaining my EDC like you, with similar results. (I could have written your post)

I agree that it doesn't return it 100%, but it does keep it going longer, and performs better than not doing anything.

Good post!

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by PhilipPasteur - 03 Nov 2012 11:31

Interesting topic for sure!

For some reason I have a hard time with steeling properly. I have several steels. That is what happens when I struggle with something, I try to get better tools. The best of the bunch (for me) is one that is entirely smooth, and that I buffed with several grades of compound to get to a close to mirror polish.

The ones with teeth or rings just seem to tear up the edge. It can feel a bit sharper for a short period, but not very long. I have better luck with a very fine ceramic cylindrical hone.

Part of the problem is that some of my knives are harder than my hsteels. Most common steels are around 60 Rc to maybe 63. I have knives that are 63 Rc and up to a claimed 68. I have been lusting after a borosilicate hone. At a Rc hardness of about 80 (equivelent) this would solve that problem. The problem is, they are very expensive. I worry that I still couldn't get good results after dumping more money on the problem.

We had a thread where we talked about steels and it show some photos at the edge. Might be a good read in relation to this thread.

www.wickededgeusa.com/index.php?option=c...d=2923&Itemid=63

Here is another interesting link:

zknives.com/knives/articles/wssteeling.shtml

I have mostly been using strops between sharpening. I tend to think that I need some abrasive to get much done in a relatively short amount of time. I typically use a 3" X 12" horse butt strop with 1 micron diamond on it. If I am being OCD, I have various levels of stops down to 0.025 micron CBN on

nanocloth (these just normally used for "show off" knives). I use this process for the kitchen knives as well as hunters and folders. I do the kitchen knives just before using them usually. This takes me through prep for a full meal easily (if I don't screw up) This is not as convenient as steeling, obviously, but it does keep the edges in reasonable shape until the next round of sharpening. I like the results.

As an aside. I got a Spyderco Military in S30 V a couple of months ago. It came pretty sharp out of the box, but not as sahrp as I want my knives to be. I decided to do an experiment. I stropped starting at 1 micron, then 0.5, 0.25, 0.120 and 0.1. About 30 strokes per side with each grit at maybe 20 degrees. I have been using it a couple of days per week for light duty stuff (cardboard, tape, rope, cutting sandwiches, etc)for the last couple of months. It is still pretty darn sharp. I think that using a strop with the right abrasives is a very good approach for maintenance.

Now, if I could just get my steeling technique to be consistent...

☺

One other thing that I have been doing quite a bit is to use my belt grinder to maintain my edges. I use a leather belt with some cromium oxide on it. I use the unsupported part of the belt (off of the platen) to get a bit of micro convexing of the edge. I use as little pressure as I can while still maintaing contact with the belt. One or two passes on each side leaves the knife very sharp. I just ake 10 minutes to do all of the knives that I might use in any given food prep session and I am good. This is possibly even less convenient than the strops, but with a bit of planning it actually saves time.

Phil

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by wickededge - 04 Nov 2012 09:13

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Geocyclist wrote:

@ Clay, have you thought about making steels for the WEPS? You could have 1 side smooth steel and the other with fine ribs. Do think anyone would use them or do people just strop for small touch ups?

It's funny you should mention this
I do have something cooking in that direction though it's a little ways off still.

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges
Posted by ApexGS - 04 Nov 2012 11:28

I usually just chuck a knife up in the clamp and hit it with the strops for touch-ups, unless I've noticeably rolled an edge. At that point I'll back up to the 1000 grit, fix the rolled edge, and polish it back up. On my EDC knives the touch-up process has gotten so fast for me I can have it done in a minute or two tops.

I don't actually own a steel and have never really looked into them. I'm happy with the strop process

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges
Posted by WayneNicklin - 04 Nov 2012 12:28

I too strop with 3x8 leather, felt and nano cloth for my personal knives. Been thinking about the same thing you do with the belt grinder with a leather belt. For commercial applications ie restaurants I need a faster way of touching these knives up on a regular basis and this sounds like a way to go. Thnx for sharing

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges
Posted by BobNash - 04 Nov 2012 13:37

ApexGS wrote:

I usually just chuck a knife up in the clamp and hit it with the strops for touch-ups, unless I've noticeably rolled an edge. At that point I'll back up to the 1000 grit, fix the rolled edge, and polish it back up. On my EDC knives the touch-up process has gotten so fast for me I can have it done in a minute or two tops.

I don't actually own a steel and have never really looked into them. I'm happy with the strop process

+1 on that.

I did work with steels before I got the Wicked Edge, but threw them out after I got it - now I do basically what Tom says, though I use balsa to touch and then the ceramics if necessary

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by Razoredge - 04 Nov 2012 14:14

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I use a glass smooth steel from my meat packing days on my kitchen knives. On my higher hardness pocket knives (ZDP-198, VG10) strops seem the way to go.

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by Geocyclist - 04 Nov 2012 15:08

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Bob, what do you use on the balsa stops?

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Re: Steeling and Stropping Finished Edges

Posted by BobNash - 04 Nov 2012 16:41

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Geocyclist wrote:

Bob, what do you use on the balsa stops?

for my EDC and kitchen knives usually 3.5 paste from Wicked Edge

Razoredge wrote:

I use a glass smooth steel from my meat packing days on my kitchen knives. On my higher hardness pocket knives (ZDP-198, VG10) strops seem the way to go.

I imagine you got quite a bit of practice with a steel then - what is your take on technique?

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