

Alan Lacer's opinion Traditional skews are best

I love my traditional skew. But before I explain why, let me tell you what's wrong with the oval skew.

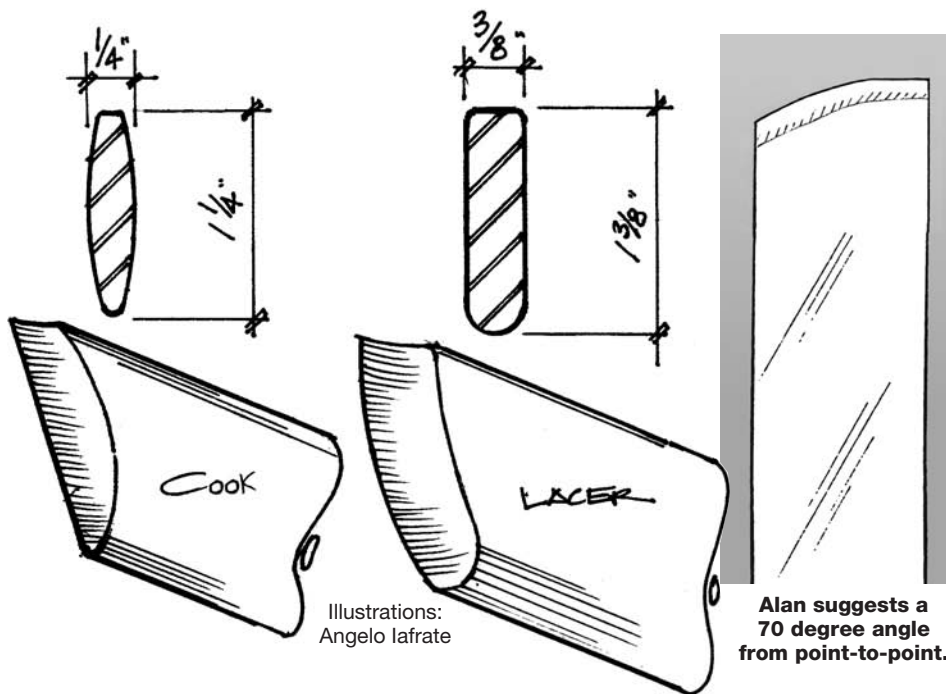
1. Hard to sharpen. The oval profile "rocks" on the rest or your fingers. It's very hard to keep it in one grinding plane for each side, let alone get two planes parallel. Solutions: Get a grinding jig or firm pressure in the middle of the tool.

2. Flimsy. You can flex the small oval skews in your hand. This translates to more bouncing of the tool when doing cuts other than light finishing cuts, requires more pressure on the tool rest to reduce this problem, and can lead to ribbing in denser woods when making a long planing cut.

3. Changing presentation. Andy Barnum first pointed out to me that when rolling a oval skew (and rubbing the bevel) the presentation or relationship of the edge to the work changes as you roll the cut. I find you must add one more action to what is already a complex series of moves. Generally this rolling cut gives turners the most difficulties; the oval section does not improve the chances for consistent success.

4. Impossible peel cut. Almost impossible to do a "peeling" cut as you do not have

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rather than curved like the signature Richard Raffan skew. I have a curved oval skew—it works well for roughing and smoothing a cylinder. The curved edge places the center one-third working area out ahead of both the toe and the heel. This makes it fairly aggressive and less likely to get a catch. This also helps to keep both the toe and heel of the tool from digging into the workpiece. At the same time, the curved edge makes cutting V's and rolling beads more difficult.

When it comes to sharpening and honing, I like the longer bevels that are standard on the oval skews. The bevels are between 20 and 22½ degrees. I prefer to use the Tormek sharpening system and the specially designed skew jig for grinding my skew. The large 10"

wheel, ultra slow speed (90 rpm) and the water bath render a uniform hollow grind that is razor sharp. Between grindings, I use the leather strop charged with 6000-grit honing compound to refine the edge.

When a Tormek is not available, I use a fine oil stone or diamond hone to keep my skew sharp. I never sharpen my skew with a standard grinder—even one that turns at 1800 rpm is much too aggressive for me.

Even though most beginners are intimidated by the skew, I usually start them out with it. It is not all that bad once they get over the initial shock. Beginners usually find that it is a very versatile tool. They soon discover that it leaves a surface that requires little sanding. I think that is reason enough to learn to use the skew.