German Steels
Posted by wickededge - 10 Dec 2012 15:29

I've been sharpening a lot of German kitchen blades and generally find that the mainstream products don't support an angle below 20 degrees well. What have others been finding?

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Re: German Steels
Posted by ApexGS - 10 Dec 2012 23:46

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wickededge wrote:

Part of my problem with my German knives is that my sharpness standard has become ridiculously high. A few years ago, I was really impressed with how well they were holding up as well, could go months without a touch up. Now the bar is higher and when a blade loses that incredibly keen feel, I notice right away. Most people would think they're still smoking sharp, but it's just not the same anymore.

I know what you mean, Clay.
I recently did some less than stellar quality "as seen on TV" sort of knives for a family friend and they didn't really seem to get as sharp as I'd have liked. Fast forward to the first time she used one to chop some apples up and it scared her half to death despite my warnings! Straight through the apple, the paper plate and into the cutting board

Not really on topic for German steels (though I still have that crazy Puma Waidblatt that's hardly fit for the "cooking" category) but most regular production knives under about $100 I've encountered left me wanting on the sharpness side of things.

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Re: German Steels
Posted by R.JeffreyCoates - 09 Feb 2013 03:09

Agreed. What used to pass as a great edge is now subject to scrutiny because one has used a sharper knife or read something about how it could be sharper.

Recently I have found that I enjoy working with carbon steel blades. They take a great edge, and although they do not hold it for a long time, when they are sharp they are really sharp. Very old Henckels / Sabatier / Wusthof

I also use an old (from the 1970s) set of Chicago Cutlery knives. They too take a great edge. - and I like the wooden scales. I know they are not the highest regarded blades but they were my first knives - a gift from my parents long ago. I think of them when I use those knives. They make me feel good. 40 years later ... I guess that says a lot.

The Japanese blades are an entirely different discussion ! By comparison to my "German" blades, the Japanese blades hardly ever need a tune up.

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Re: German Steels

Posted by davidmcm77 - 09 Feb 2013 21:24

I have found for the German knives I've sharpened they do best at 20-22 degrees and a 1k edge stropped with 3.5um paste.

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Re: German Steels

Posted by wickededge - 10 Feb 2013 12:55

R.JeffreyCoates wrote:

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Nice post. I've also got a couple of blades that mean something to me even though they're not made

from especially great materials. They remind me of something/someone and are a joy to sharpen and use for that reason. Every time I sharpen them or use them, it's like connecting with that person again. I wonder what stories others here on the forum might have about a knife that really means something to them because of how they came to own it or use it; might be a good topic on its own.

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Re: German Steels
Posted by mark76 - 12 Feb 2013 16:59

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Interesting discussion!

I sharpen a lot of knives for friends, family, etc. And since I nearly live in Germany, most knives I sharpen are... indeed. They are not always the nice Wusthoffs, Henckels or Zwillings, more often no-brand knives. But my experience is like yours: even the better brands don't take an angle of less than 20 degrees or so. I routinely sharpen these knives at 20 degrees. If I don't know what the brand/steel is, I usually go to 25 degrees.

I really wonder why that is the case. I understand people want stainless steel and that if a knife is too hard or has too steep an angle, it may become vulnerable. But why are they so different from, e.g., Japanese knives? These generally take a much steeper angle (even a cheap CCK cleaver I've got – or is this Chinese?). These knives are usually quite a bit harder. And it appears as if carbon steels are more common there than in the West.

The stainless steels I like the best are from Sweden: 13C26 and 19C27. But even the cheaper variety, 12C27 is pretty good. And these steels are used in the majority of French knives I sharpen.

But Germany is closer to Sweden than France is... I just don't get it. Anyone here who does?

That's not to say I don't get it about all high-end German kitchen knives. I recently stumbled on a Robert Herder knife that was made of carbon steel. It was incredibly thin and took a great edge. When I googled the company, I found that it was quite an old and respected German company. And they make stainless knives as well... of X50CrMoV15.

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Re: German Steels
Posted by Geocyclist - 16 Feb 2013 17:30

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Sharpened my first Wusthof today, a 6.5" Santoku. I read this post again before starting and was thinking about going with 20 degrees (per side). Once I had the knife in the vice I realized the factory edge was dead on 15 degrees. So I stayed with 15. This knife is 2 years old and got steeled on a regular basis. It is not sharp but not super dull either.

I did a before sharpness test. It would not slice phone book paper and it would not push cut the phone book. I added more pressure and it cut to page 110. After sharpening I sliced phone book paper with ease and push cut the entire book (500 pages) with the same force used before. Now that it's sharp again I will have to see how the edge holds up. My other Wusthofs look like they are greater than 15 degrees, but haven't put anything else in the vice.

When I had this knife new it felt like I had a wire edge. I could feel it move from one side to the other when steeling. Now i don't feel this, but will have to see as time goes by. So I think I got it plenty sharp without the wire edge.

As this is a kitchen knife I stopped at the 1600 ceramics. (Don't own the micro fines). I decided stropping would not add much vs. the time required. Maybe I should have. This is my first good kitchen knife I have sharpened on the WEPS.

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Re: German Steels

Posted by mark76 - 17 Feb 2013 03:53

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Geo, I am curious how the edge is after a few weeks of use. It'll probably not chip, but I'm curious how long it stays sharp and whether it rolls.

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Re: German Steels

Posted by R.JeffreyCoates - 16 Apr 2013 23:00

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I agree 20 is about it.

I find that they will take a finer edge . . . but it will not last long.

The same w/ Chicago Cutlery. I have some "vintage C.C. ... 60's & 70's ... not great but I like them. They always took a good edge and performed well. I just did 24 C.C. steak knives (model 103 S) to 18.00 deg. Makes even tough steak seem tender . . . but the edges go fast.

Same with my Vintage carbon steel Sabatier, Wusthof, and Henckels. They are softer steel. A joy to sharpen. They take the edge fast and well.

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