

Stanley Sweetheart 60-1/2 Block Plane Review

By Rob Young for the Kansas City Woodworkers' Guild (www.kcwoodworkersguild.org) October 2010



Figure 1 Stanley Sweetheart 60-1/2 Block Plane
(Image source: Stanley Tools)

In 2008, Stanley re-introduced their Sweetheart line of premium hand planes. These looked great on paper and lots of pretty pictures. But on the whole, there were problems. Complaints of poor and inconsistent machining and, underdesigned mechanical components made them an over-all disappointment. It would seem somebody at Stanley's toolworks was paying attention. Little by little, Stanley has been re-working the manufacturing of their Sweetheart planes, improving the quality. So, as I enjoy a bargain I decided to take a look at their 60-1/2 low angle block plane.

The 60-1/2 (Stanley gives it a catalog number of 12-139 to conform to their new part numbering scheme) retails for \$100. Shop around a bit and you can find them for less.

Shop harder and you can get one for a lot less. \$44 was a deal I couldn't refuse; Amazon.com is a magical place.

Here are the raw numbers to describe the plane I received.

Length	6-7/16"
Body Width	2-5/32"
Blade Width	1-5/8"
Weight	32 ½ oz
Bedding Angle	12° (blade ground to 25°)
Blade Thickness	0.120"
Blade Material	A2

A few comments on these figures; first is the overall size compared to a vintage Stanley 60-1/2 or Millers-Falls 56B, this is a big block plane. It is longer, wider and much heavier at just a shade over two pounds. This is not an "apron plane" and those with small hands may have some comfort issues. I found the plane fit well in my hand and the two machined indentations on the wings were very well placed. The curve of the levercap was comfortable in my palm.

While the body is a very heavy iron casting, the cap is not iron or steel. It is curiously lightweight, made perhaps of aluminum. The main body is cast but I will not be applying the anvil test to discover if it is ductile iron. The blade is advertised as a full 0.125" (1/8"). I measured it with both calipers and a micrometer, never finding it to be significantly more than 0.120". Still, the blade is pleasantly thick with a good finish, flat back and well-honed edge from the factory.

When I removed the plane from its packaging, it was covered in a light coat of oil. Before beginning to “play” I disassembled the plane and wiped down all the surfaces. While apart, I quickly honed the blade in my usual manner with some green compound on MDF. I don’t have much experience with A2 steel blades but compared the few LN blades I’ve sharpened this block plane blade felt quite similar.

The depth adjuster is a Norris style meaning it both sets the depth of cut as well as alters the skew angle of the blade. I found my plane to have about one and a quarter turns of backlash in its adjuster. This is less than my other Stanley and Millers-Falls planes (one of which has over two full turns of backlash) but more than some LN and Veritas planes I’ve used. I don’t find this to be an excessive amount.

The lateral adjustment, however, did give me some trouble as it would shift during heavy cuts. Granted, block planes are not made for heavy cuts but I was curious to see how well it worked shooting end grain and got a little carried away. I disassembled the plane again and discovered there was more oil down inside the adjuster. I removed the excess oil and now the adjustment seems more stable. There is also a set-screw that can be used to increase the tension of the adjustment.

A common complaint against the earlier Sweetheart re-release planes was their machining. The machining of the bed is very true at less than 0.002” deviation from side to side as measured from the center outward. I would consider most of that to be within the margin of error for my dial indicator and measuring setup. The lever cap is a bit of a puzzle being that it seems so light. Nevertheless, it is well machined and designed so that it applies slightly more pressure at the center where the cap screw engages. As with all planes, tighten the lever cap only enough to keep the blade secure but still allow blade adjustments. Over tightening of this (or any) lever cap may cause it to crack.

The bed of the plane is quite true from side to side. The thinnest feeler gauge in my set is 0.002” and it would not slip between the bed and the straight edge. From toe to heel I found the same situation with the greatest gap a few inches behind the blade and no daylight showing between the bed and straight edge at the adjustable mouth piece and just behind the blade and at the heel. This is a nearly perfect situation.

Enough with the measuring, how does it cut? It cuts well. Quite well, thank you. The mouth of the 60-1/2 can be adjusted, with the goal being to set it at just a shade over the thickness of shaving you expect to take. The adjustment mechanism and machining of the ways in the body are well done but the mechanism has the same flaw I have seen in other adjustable mouth metal planes. As you tighten the knob to hold the adjustment it can force the mouth closed just a bit more. Learning to compensate for the shift takes only a little practice but those first few times are very frustrating. The 60-1/2 does not have the set-screw feature found on some modern low angle planes to create a stop for the moveable mouth position.

Here are some sample shavings from white oak, cherry, walnut and mystery pine. I could consistently achieve a shaving thickness of 0.001" or less and thicker shavings were no trouble for a sharp blade. So this little block plane shows great versatility.



End-grain application proved no problem. Note the thickness of the hard maple end-grain shaving, 0.003" is quite thick. I have not altered the cutting angle beyond adding a very small microbevel from

honing. The effective cutting angle of a block plane is the sum of its bed angle (12°) plus its blade bevel angle (25°) and any microbevel for just over 37° in this case. The effective cutting angle can be increased well into the 50° range if needed. It would be best to do so using spare blades. As a small shooting board plane it was very effective as the body is square and the Norris adjuster allows the blade to be skewed to accommodate any deviation. Free-hand, it cut end-grain with ease.



Overall I would recommend the Stanley Sweetheart 60-1/2 low angle block plane (12-139) as a very good value for the money. Be sure to check your received plane for manufacturing defects and quality control as I imagine there are still old-stock planes out there. Comments may be directed to guild@kcwoodworkersguild.org.