

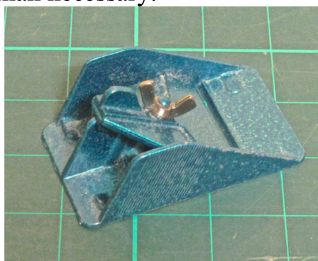
SHAPING THOSE LEADING AND TRAILING EDGES

by George White

Dave Mitchell's column in the October 2013 Flying Models Magazine provided some fresh ideas about the challenge we all face in shaping the leading and trailing edges of wings.

I learned early on that when a balsa stick is sanded, if any significant amount of pressure is applied by the sanding block the stick will tend to bow toward the side which is being sanded. That's a particular hazard for the trailing edge.

As a consequence, I've always used a razor plane such as the one in the photograph to rough shape the leading and trailing edges in order to reduce the sanding to a minimum. Even after roughing up the shape, the sanding then became a touchy exercise to keep from eating into the ribs. Then using built up ribs, it's especially important that you don't take off any more balsa from them than necessary.



As Dave says in his column, you need a long sanding block if you're going to do a decent job. You can buy nice aluminum ones at just about any model supply shop, or you can make one from a 9" to 12" long piece of 1X2" pine board. 180 grit sandpaper is ideal for doing this job. An additional block holding 220 grit is a nice finishing addition.

Dave makes his job much simpler by first making himself a 9X22 inch board (a piece of 1/2" ply would be ideal because you know it's likely to be flat), to which he has glued sheets of 180 grit sandpaper. By doing that, he's got a perfect surface for holding the wing (or any other flat item) while you sand.

The photos below are self explanatory. Dave stretches a piece of blue painter's tape across the ribs, leaving just the leading edge and trailing edge exposed. Sand away and when the tape starts to show abrasion, stop and finish off with some 220 grit. If you find that some ribs are higher than others, stop and fix it if it's really gross, otherwise just let the sanding block do the talking and level it down. Just resist the urge to "spot sand" or you'll have a sorry looking, wavy edge.

