

History of the Skil 100 Planer

Don't know the origin of this write-up but it is an excellent piece of history.

We added this section because many people question why Clark Foam is in the power planer business. We also think some history might be interesting to a person who uses power planers to earn their living.

In 1988 the Skil Corporation suddenly announced they were discontinuing production of all power planers. Since it was introduced in the 1930's, the Skil 100 planer had been used for almost all surfboard shaping. In 1988 a Rockwell planer was the only other power planer in use by professional shapers.

While questioning a Skil Vice President in 1988 we were told the following: "The planer was selling well but their tooling was worn out. The tooling had been built in the 1930's. It was their prediction that the new plastic planers would be cheaper to produce and would eventually capture the market. They felt it was not a good investment to retool. It turned out that they were right. The market for surfboard planers is so tiny and specialized that they laughed at our problem. "

Immediately Clark Foam looked at and purchased every type planer then available in the United States. We decided a modified Hitachi F-30 would be the best substitute for the Skil 100. We began modifying the F-30. At the last minute we included a modified Hitachi F-20 as a "beginners planer" or "small board" planer.

Much to our surprise the F-20 outsold the F-30 by a huge margin. Modifying the F-30 was almost a waste of our time. Hitachi made the decision for us when they discontinued the F-30 in the early 1990's.

Looking back we attribute the success of the smaller planers to a combination of availability, lower cost, and lightweight. Many believe the lightweight was the most significant factor. Since the 1988 introduction of the modified F-20 several things have happened. We made a few modifications such as the vacuum attachment and several minor design changes. We improved our production technique. Hitachi's production was moved from Japan to China resulting in a slight decrease in quality and a decrease in price. The F-20 was replaced by the P-20SB. (The changes were insignificant.) Computer controlled shaping machines appeared, decreasing the demand for planers. And last, but probably most significant, it turned out there was a large supply of Skill 100 planers around the world.

Despite rumors and some opinions to the contrary, there were no new planers developed after 1988 that were better suited to shaping surfboards than the modified P-20SB series.

By 2003 four things had clearly changed. First the cost of the Skil 100 parts and planers had increased dramatically. While they are incredibly durable they are slowly wearing out. Some spare parts are being manufactured, but at a very high cost. Second it had become very clear

the P-20SB is durable and a good value rather than a "plastic toy". Third some shapers had gotten really good at using the modified P-20SB and evidently preferred it to the Skil 100 for some or all of their shaping. One of the major factors was weight. Last some serious shapers were identifying problems with the modified P-20SB and were making some pretty trick modifications.

By 2003 we realized that Clark Foam had made some serious errors. First we did not include a manual such as this one with all of our modified planers. A lot of shapers were really struggling with the required maintenance and repairs. Furthermore, many shapers did not know we carried parts, could offer phone help, and did repairs. Last, and most serious, we had not made a commitment to the continued development of the planer.

The commitment was made to fix our errors. As a first step we again looked at all planers available in the United States. We now have a very contemporary planer collection at our factory. The Bosch 1594 clearly won the overall design, power, and RPM award for an out of the box small planer. Our analysis showed the Bosch 1594 would be difficult to convert to a surfboard planer so we stuck with the P-20SB. In our opinion it is still the easiest planer to modify and it has some other significant advantages.

As a first step in the development process we got a lot of input from shapers. We also checked out numerous modifications made by shapers.

We carefully studied the Skill 100. During our development work we concluded that the original 1930's Skil 100 designer went on to design the first atomic bomb. What a design!

During testing and information gathering we noticed the majority of shapers were running their planers on dull blades. This is the equivalent of reducing a planer's power. It also limits the amount of the final shaping that can be done using a power planer. This is how we came up with the idea of a blade exchange and a blade sharpening service.

Once we had the power planer sharpening service in place we extended the service to the hand planers we sell.

for Quigg's considerable surfing ability, an outside move like this design could have led to total ostracization from the point elite."

In May of 1948, Quigg built "Pintail #2" categorizing it as a 'speed board' and the 'first narrow pintail, later called a big wave gun.' "It was a pintail with a spear-like look," said www.soul-surfer.com. "a flat bottom, low sharp rails and a 100% breakaway tail. 'Unfazed by the... negative reception,' he and his pintails received at Malibu, 'Joe cuts the pintail board in half longitudinally, removes the center area and re-glues it producing an even narrower, gunnier board. The result, a very fast sinker. The reaction: total rejection... Only Gard Chapin has a few kind words to offer. He was intrigued over the board's exotic features such as its fiberglass fin (the first ever). Quigg's experimentation with the fins on this board included multiple configurations: The first tri fin."

What Quigg sketched en route to Hawaii and on the way back, and what he experimented with in California was the Adam of the modern, big-wave pintail gun, a board that was about to come in very handy at Makaha, and would be further improved by the coming innovation in polyurethane foam.