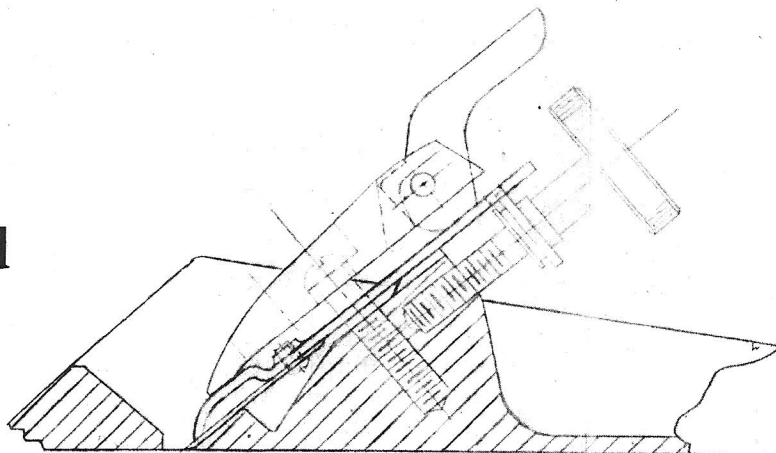


Stanley No. 140 Bench Plane

Clarence Blanchard



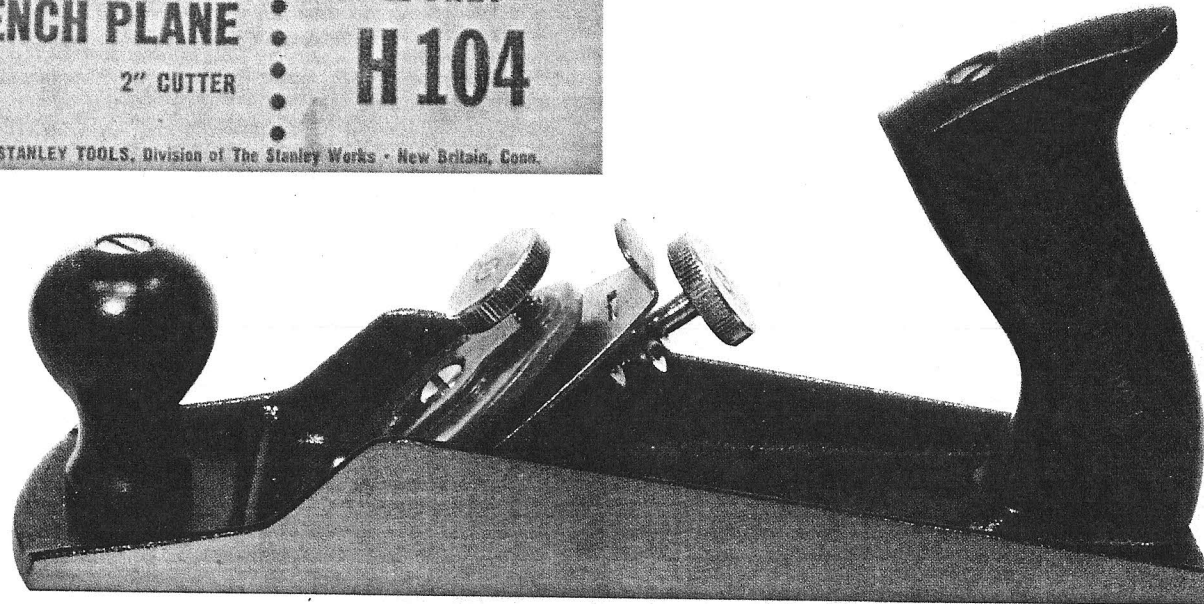
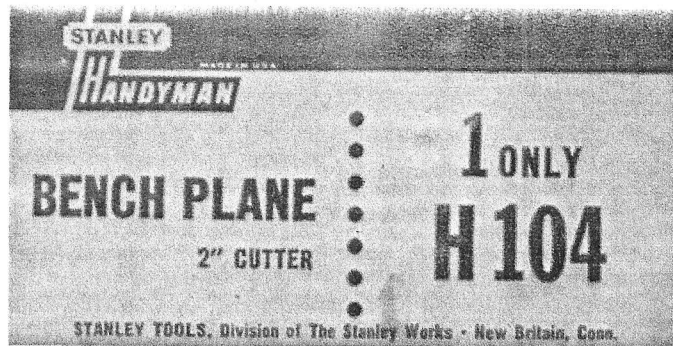
As Stanley collectors, we often find ourselves wondering how many items made up a production run or how did a tool get from the drafting board to the hardware store. Except for the catalogs issued during the last half of the 19th century, which show how many Bailey planes sold, little information has come to light. And as for how they did it, Stanley ain't telling. So when a production folder for the Stanley No. 140 throw-a-way cutter plane showed up, you can believe it got my attention.

Granted, the plane and information are late in the game as far as collectible Stanley tools are concerned. Certainly, the same level of information for the 1860s would be better than the 1960s, but we have to go with what comes to light. The one thing that we can assume with some degree of certainty is that Stanley developed the procedures for introducing a new tool over a long period of time. Like many large companies, Stanley no doubt made changes slowly and the steps taken in the 1960s were at least similar to those used for years.

The earliest information dates to the spring of 1960. Sometime before April, Stanley decided to produce a throw-a-way blade plane. The plane was known as the Low Price Plane with no number assigned. This plane was to compete with the four-way throw-a-way blade planes being offered by Sears and others. The size would be the same as a number 4, but the body design was to have a low side profile that saved materials and reduced casting costs.

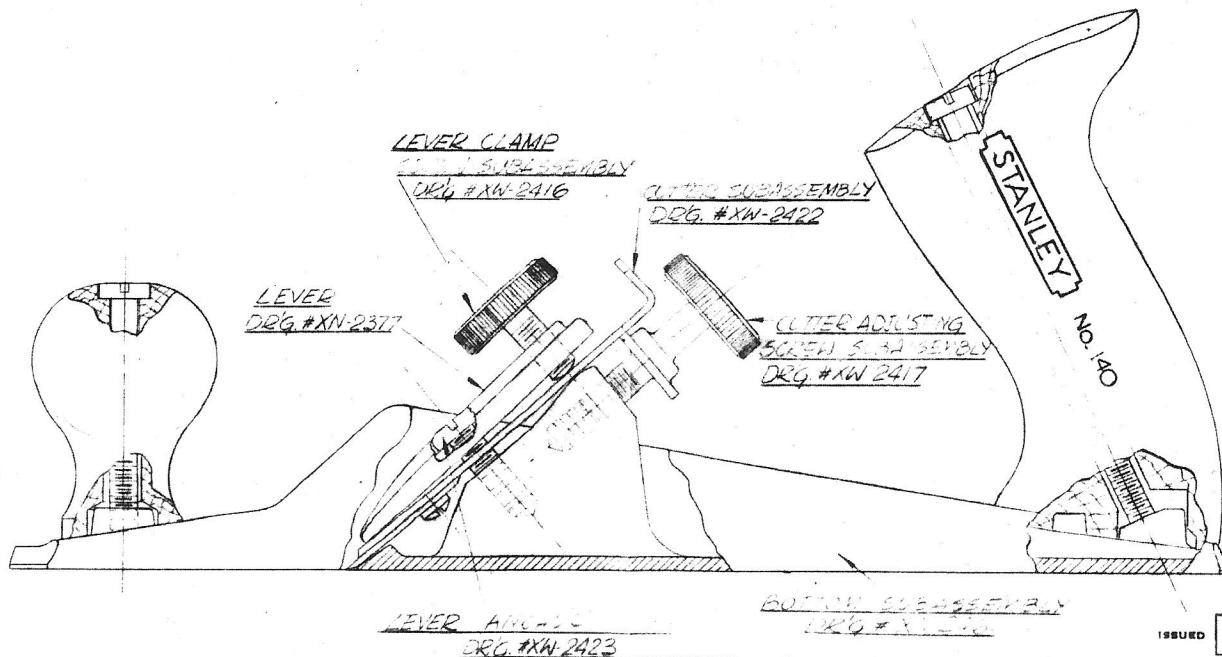
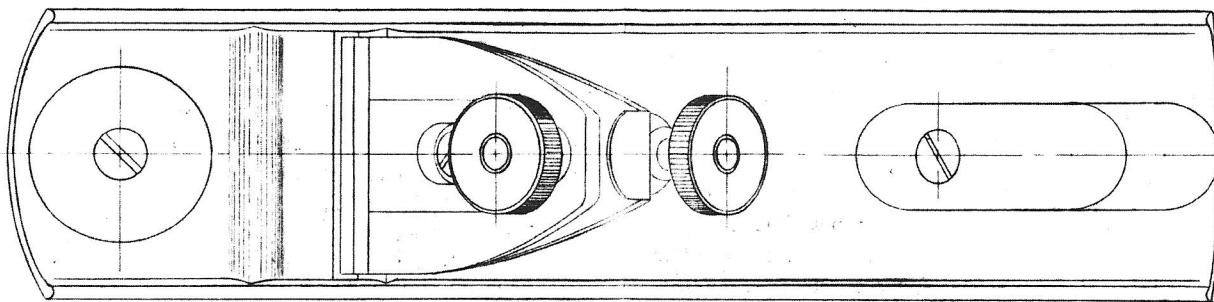
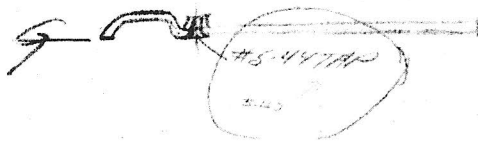
W. Robinson did a series of concept sketches in April; see fig.1 of the blade assembly. By the middle of July, blueprint drawings were well along with prints for the body, cutter assembly, and other parts. The cutter assembly is shown in fig. 2. At this early stage, the plane was intended to be an addition to the top-end Stanley tool line. The design includes a stylized Bailey lever cap and an arched cap iron.

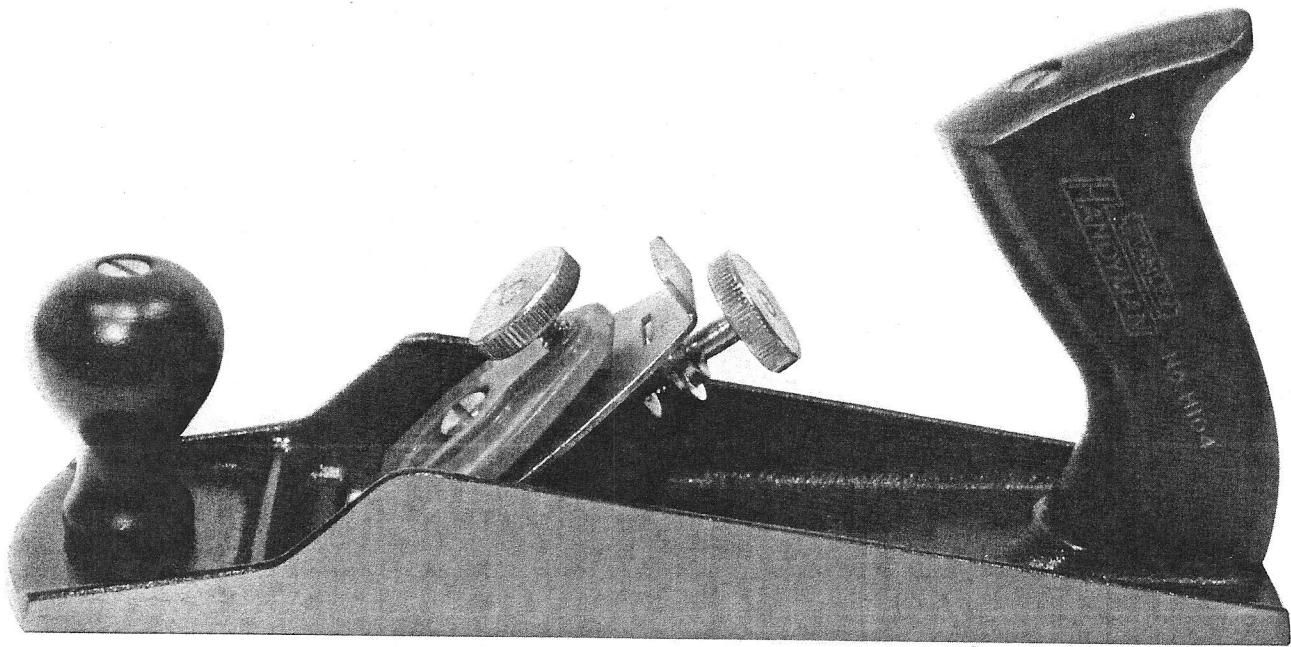
Design and revisions continued through 1960; in the spring of 1961, the designers were nearing completion of their work. By March 1961, the design had undergone many



Stanley Handyman No. H104 bench plane. This uncommon plane started out as a part of the regular Stanley line. See Stanley Plane Truth and Exceptions to the Rule on page 18 for more details.

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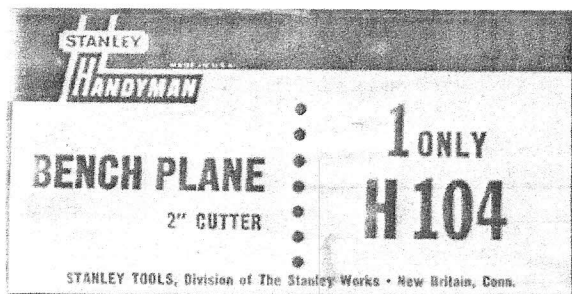




changes (see sketch, bottom of page 19). The lever cap was now a screw cap, the cap iron is flat, and the top end of the blade has been bent upward to act as a lateral adjustment. To the tool collector/Stanley history buff, the most interesting thing is that the plane now has a model number 140--a reissue of the number used for the cutter block plane.

R.F. West, in a memo dated March 22, 1961, gives us insight into the timeline and reasons for the new plane. The memo indicates that models and cost information will be submitted to the New Goods Committee in April and that the plane should be ready for Operating Committee approval in June. West goes on to estimate that 12 to 14 months would be required for the pilot lot and the first production run. Based on his estimates, West anticipates that finished stock would be available on or before September 1, 1962.

West's memo goes on to indicate that their two-way cutter avoids the weak corners that exist within the four-way cutter. West states that Stanley can sell two 2-way cutters cheaper than Sears can sell one of their 4-way cutters. This is the first indication that the new plane is intended to be in competition with the Sears line. West projects a list price of \$3.50 to \$3.75 as compared to a Sears or Wards catalog price of \$2.98.



On May 3, 1961, a report written by J. M. Don was submitted to the New Goods Committee. The report proposed to produce a new low-price 10-inch bench plane. The plane would have a die-cast bottom, double-edge throw-a-way cutter, adjustment for depth of cut, and lateral adjuster. The tote was to be branded with a pressure-sensitive label. Blue and yellow finish was recommended for regular Stanley distribution, gray and red for brand accounts. Two models were supplied with the proposal. In describing the models, the words "as per above description" are used; therefore, it is assumed that models for both color schemes were submitted.

The report further indicates that a Factory Cost of \$126.27 per hundred was anticipated. Freight was pegged at \$7.00 per hundred and Selling Expense at \$22.75 per hundred. The total Cost To Sales was, therefore, \$156.02 per hundred. Profit margins from 10.8 to 19.5 percent were considered. Development costs to April were listed as \$4,348.26 and were not included in the estimated cost.

The New Goods Committee approved the proposal on May 4, 1961. The plane was to have an extra blade and sell for \$2.25. With the nod from New Goods, the plane moved to the Operating Committee.

The Operating Committee minutes for June 13, 1961, restates the New Goods report with only minor changes. The model number is now H140 and the colors are to be determined later. The extra cutter is to be in a paper envelope with a selling message. This is also the first indication of production quantities. The Pilot Lot will be 500 pieces, the Initial Lot 20,000 pieces, with an annual sales estimate of 50,000 units. And some things never change: West's March memo indicated a finished stock date of September 1, 1962;

the committee now wants the planes done and ready for the 1962 Spring Promotion on Planes--at least 6 to 9 months earlier than originally projected.

By the fall of 1961, the plane model number had been changed. In a request to the Operating Committee dated August 31, 1961, West and Don requested changes in the catalog numbers and colors of three planes. The 101PA was to become the H101P, 120 was changed to H102, and 140 became H104. The request states that the sales department had checked these numbers. Did someone finally figure out that Stanley had already made the 101, 120, and 140 planes?

In an *Avoid Verbal Orders* memo dated September 15, 1961, the gray iron casting for Part #C140 Bottom for the #H104 plane are approved by J. M. Don. This is the earliest memo with the H104 designation found.

On September 20, 1961, the Operating Committee made the August 31, 1961, request official. In addition to the new numbers, the colors were changed to Handyman blue and red. The handle was not to be branded with Stanley Handyman in red. The unwritten but important part of this approval is that the plane was moved from top-line production to the second-line Handyman production. Did Stanley decide that the quality just was not top-line or did someone recall the poor sales associated with 1920s disposable blade?

When the H104 plane actually made it to the sales counter cannot be determined from the information at hand. Changes were being made in October and November 1962, but these changes were updating drawings and adjusting screw lengths that could have resulted for information gathered from the Pilot Lot. Even allowing plenty of late time, it is reasonable to assume that the finished H104s did become available some time in 1962.

The H104 Bench Plane had a short life of less than four years. On June 13, 1967, the Operating Committee discontinued the #H104 Bench Plane. The reason given was low sales. Parts on hand were to be scrapped. The Mail Order Department was to obtain a supply of spare parts sufficient for ten years service before the remainder was scrapped. All tooling except for a blanking die and tapping fixture was to be scrapped.

The various parts used to manufacture the H104 came from many different sources. It appears that Stanley purchased most of the parts that went into the plane. Bottoms came from Landers, Frary & Clark. The screws and more standard parts were purchased from companies that specialize in manufacture of similar items. The most interesting bit of information is that Eagle Square Mfg. Co. made the handles. Eagle was a Stanley family. No information or competitive pricing was found on

the wooden parts. Wood was listed as maple, birch, or beech. The available information does indicate that Stanley did all of the machine work and finishing in-house.

The number of H104s that were manufactured is not known from the data available; however, from the wording in the discontinue order, it is clear that production made it out of the Pilot Lot stage and into the full production stage. Therefore, we know that more than 500 Pilot Lot planes were made. The first production run was authorized at 20,000 units. All of the quotes for parts are based on the more pieces ordered, the better the price. So, with a 20,000 authorization, the purchasing department no doubt ordered 20,000 of each part. How many planes were assembled is a hard question to answer. Because the plane was a poor seller, it is reasonable to assume that a second production run was never authorized. We know that parts remained in 1967 and that very likely those parts came from the first production run. Considering that the plane is far from common and that it is only 40 years old, I would guess that a lot fewer than the original 20,000 were ever actually assembled.

We have to be careful in applying this information to earlier production projects. I do think we can safely assume that Stanley did use a Pilot Lot approach and took a couple of years to go from an idea to a finished plane. Beyond that, this is best considered a guide when looking at other models.

Based on this new information, the H104 bench plane was offered from 1962 to 1967. Because the starting and ending dates were only partial years, the plane could be considered very short-lived. No doubt, a few of these sat on hardware store shelves until a Stanley collector came along in the early 1970s looking of those new-in-the-box tools. 🛠️

Many thanks to John Ballintine for sharing the original Stanley papers.

