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.
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 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

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