



THE LAST STROKE

The Reverend Oliver Harrison on the intricacies of a flawless straight shave

So let us assume you have your straight (also called open or cut-throat) razor and you have your strop on which to buff the blade. All is ready. First, let's look at the hold. Open the razor so that the part of the tang which is on the other side of the pivot pin from the blade passes right through the scales. The scales, you will remember, are the two panels comprising the handle. The tang is the lowest, and unsharpened, part of the blade; the pivot pin is typically halfway along the tang and therefore bisects it.

You've now effectively turned the razor inside out, through about 270 to 300 degrees (a normal penknife opens to 180 so the blade come out level with the handle; we're going further, right through the handle). Now hold the tang either side of the pivot pin and place the handle (the scales) up between your fingers (usually between the fourth and little finger, or what-

ever is comfortable for you. Hands and razors all differ in size). With your thumb in the heel of the blade, press the tang against the inside of your fingers, more or less across the top joint below the soft fingertip pads. Hold it firmly but be careful not to put any stress on the pivot pin joint or you will crack the scales – and

have you attempted getting hold of any ivory lately? Troublesome even at the Elephant and Castle – trust me, I tried! (Although they did offer to fix any other crack related problems I might have).

The blade is now facing you, the handle up and out of the way between your fingers and your thumb is pressing down in the heel of the blade holding the tang against the inside of your fingers. Easy! Now to put cold, hard steel to your warm, soft skin.

Shaving is done in a series of passes, in between which we must re-lather. For the first pass, aim to have the razor at 30 degrees to your face and shave ↗

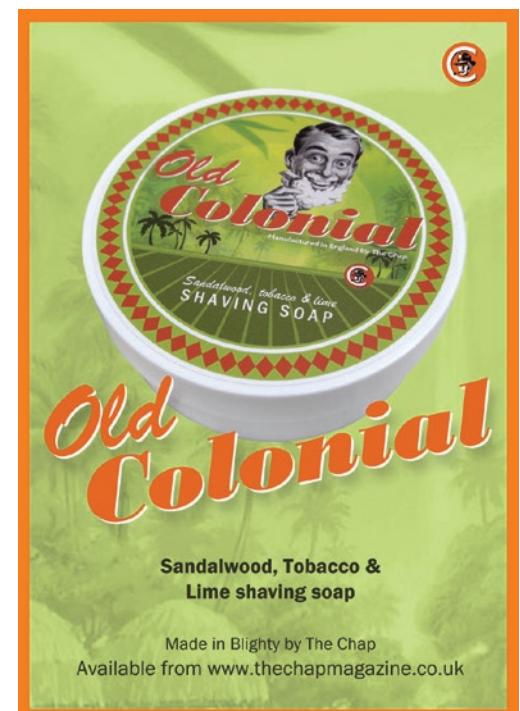
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with the grain (WTG, i.e. in the direction that the hairs of your beard grow); for subsequent passes, use progressively shallower angles and shave first across the grain (XTG) and finally against the grain (ATG). Keep pressure to an absolutely minimum and your strokes short. Practice on your shin (no need to lather) first, with the razor flat against the skin; shave up towards your knee, with so shallow an angle it should simply glide over the hairs, pushing them down and under the blade without cutting them; next put the blade at ninety degrees, perpendicular to the skin: it may scrape but again, no cut. Come back to flat position we used in the first exercise and slowly raise the elevation with each successive pass – et voila! Observe (not to mention feel and hear) the scything of follicles.

Last point: skin stretching. You want your hair to stand proud and your skin to be tight or you risk shaving your face off. So pull the skin taut in the opposite direction to the shaving stroke. This is where sideburns come in handy; a chap can simply pull up on his mutton chops

and shave downwards below them with impunity. Remember, though, to change how and where you stretch when you change the direction of the shave: it should always be in the opposite direction to the pass. Do not attempt to carve yourself a new face; you may wish to look like Cary Grant but self-administered cosmetic surgery is not the way to do it. As with one's fly fishing cast or golf swing, it is well worth getting professional lessons as self-taught bad habits learned early can set, harden and prove difficult to shift (and slicing a stroke in golf is nothing compared to slicing a stroke with a straight razor). Good luck and remember to have your blood group tattooed on you somewhere it will be seen – assuming they find you in time. With that in mind, you might want to leave the bathroom door unlocked. ↗





01 MARTIN DE CANDRE: LE SAVON À RASER

An old joke: where do you hide your money from a Frenchman? Answer: under the soap. But not in this case, because you won't have any money left to hide. This is a seriously expensive soap and, oddly, as shaving soaps go, not even the best performer out there and yet... I love it. The lather is good – not great, but certainly stable enough to be whipped into stiff peaks, much like egg whites on their way to becoming meringues. Again, the slide and glide it offers to the blade is good enough but not excessive; others offer a more lubricious and cushioning layer between steel and skin. And yet, from the moment I unscrew the lid of the heavy glass jar and smell the incredible aroma of French lavender with a hint of rosemary and the merest suggestion of the astringency of mint, I am undone. I am in love. The scent explodes as the lather is worked



and remains close to the skin all day, like a private joke shared between lovers before breakfast. The skin is left soft and smooth and one feels one has had a brush – forgive the pun – with royalty, genius, celebrity, holiness and beauty. Ah, Martin, marry me – I'll change my surname to de Candre and we'll live together forever in a small French farmhouse with a watermill and a trout stream. Je t'adore.

02 TABAC SHAVING STICK



The original 'tallow marshmallow', first made in Germany in 1936. (Where were Germans getting their tallow from in the late 1930s? Perhaps best not to ask.) A very forgiving soap, hard either to over-

or under-hydrate, perfect for beginners still learning the art of adding water via the brush to build the lather. And what a lather: very rich and thick, uber-lubricious and therefore tolerant of poor technique. However, a word of caution: some chaps detest the smell, likening it to decaying wreaths of funeral flowers. Personally, I find it merely at the extreme end of the 'soapy' – a masculine, leathery bittersweet blend that includes geranium, lavender and lots of oakmoss. But if you really can't stand it, the same product is available with a different scent under the rather surreal name of 'Sir Irisch Moos' with a fresh, 'green' fragrance (although I personally think it smells of Poundland toilet cleaner blended with market stall air freshener, but there you go).

03 THE THREE TS



Geo F. Trumper, Truefitt & Hill and Taylor of Old Bond Street are collectively known, in grooming circles, as The Three T's, forming the heart and home of English shaving. Their shaving creams are, I believe, all made by Creightons in Peterborough and are all of a consistently high quality. Indeed, it's a tribute to everyone concerned that, although all three outsource the manufacturing of their creams to the same subcontractor, it does not make their products indistinguishable. Individual formulae are strictly adhered to and therefore each cream is unique. The best? Personally, I adore all of Trumper's creams – especially the coconut (although, oddly, I've never been a fan of their hard soaps). Best value? Taylor of Old Bond Street. But for sheer luxury and hang the expense, try any of Truefitt & Hill's range of soaps in turned wooden bowls: lovely stuff.

04 OLD COLONIAL



A toss-up for number 4, so a joint entry: Old Colonial, The Chap Magazine's very own exclusive brand of shaving soap, with the new improved version featuring strong lime notes on a base of sandalwood and

tobacco. It also now comes in an attractive screw-top tin. Sharing the honours in this double-header is 'Nanny's Silly Soap' – a vegan soft soap made from all natural and sustainably sourced materials. Nanny

is an artisan soap-maker who consulted with wet shavers to make a soap from scratch designed around their needs. Quite apart from the ethics, the lather is top notch and the scents are amazing – a wide range of imaginative new creations and innovative twists on old favourites. Like other soft soaps, this has the consistency of fudge or putty; unlike others, these are available in 10g samples for under a pound each – well worth ordering a variety pack to try all of these fantastic fragrances. And it's only available via Nanny's website.



05 PRORASO



On certain mornings after a heavy night, Jeeves would make Bertie Wooster a 'bracer' – a kind of reviving tonic. This venerable Italian eucalyptus & menthol barbershop cream is just the thing to wake up a chap on a dark and cold winter morn, although personally I find its cooling properties also perfect for a warm summer's day or a sticky tropical clime. Oodles of luscious lather with a big menthol "hit". An instant classic. Often imitated, never equalled.