

JRWC Workshop Project October 2020
Flat Plane Carving a Swedish “Dala Harst”
References

INTERNET:

YouTube.com American Swedish Institute, Harley Refsal Dala Horse Carving Process “Whittling Tiny” Not very helpful, a 1 minute series of black and white photos showing some stages of carving the “Tiny” horse we are carving. But it is followed by a 10 minute program which has some helpful scenes of horse carving at the Swedish factory, titled Tormac Visit.

Www.scandinaviastandard.com/how-to-make-a-traditional-swedish-dala-horse
www.northhouse.org

www.popularwoodworking.com/home/tools/tooltest/mora_kniv_woodcarving_set, Andrew Zeller, Sept. 2020, \$59.99 straight knife & hook knife tested. Amazon carries.

BOOKS:

Carving Flat Plane Style Caracatures, Harley Refsal, Fox Chapel Publishing Co., Inc., East Petersburg, PA, 2011.

Woodcarving in the Scandinavian Style, Harley Refsal, Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., New York, NY, 1992.

Whittling Little Folk, Harley Refsal, Fox Chapel Publishing Co., Inc., East Petersburg, PA, 2011.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Basswood Cutout Blanks from JRWC project kit, “Tiny” and “Horse 3”

Cut-resistant carving glove and leather thumb guard. (If you prefer to carve barehanded, tournequet and some large gauze bandages recommended.)

Straight carving knife, very sharp and free of nicks.

Detail knives, straight and curved.

V tool and a 1/4” #9 sweep gouge if desired.

Blade honing system of your choice. You will want to strop the blade about every 30 minutes.

Ruler, #2 pencil, good white or green eraser, small piece #220 sandpaper to be used only in desperation.

Boiled Linseed Oil, Acrylic paints, brushes, satin polyurethane varnish.

NOTE: You can carve the two blanks using as many knives and gouges as you wish, and apply sandpaper to take off all sharp places. But if you do, your carving will not have the charm which the handcrafted Swedish dala horses made so popular.

PROCEDURES

These procedures are specific for the “Tiny” blank. Less experienced carvers may prefer to start with the “Horse 3” blank which is a little easier. Most of the following procedures are applicable, except for not having landmark lines and the measurements given.

1. The blank for “Tiny” has landmark lines on one side. With a pencil, mark the same pattern of landmark lines on the other side. Mark a center line around the edge of the blank.

2. Decide on these features of your carving: with tail or without as most Swedish dalas are; whether the legs are to be separated or just marked with deep grooves between; whether ears and forelock are to be detailed or left solid. Mark your blank accordingly.
3. Find the grain direction of the wood in your blank. The grain will be vertical, but will be “down hill” from hoof to top in about half the blanks and reverse in the other half. You will try to carve down hill of the grain whenever possible. When you must go across grain, carve with a sliding or skewed cut to leave a smooth surface.
4. Study the pattern, the pictures of the completed horse, and the blank. The landmark lines indicate general areas where the elevation of the wood changes. The main body from hoofs to the horizontal line and diagonal to chest mark the part which will remain almost uncarved except for rounding off edges and texturing. The area of the mane and saddle slope inward some. The head will slope from the nose (which is about 1/3 the thickness of the blank) back to almost full thickness at the mane line. The area of the chest and lower neck are fairly deeply carved to allow shaping of the head, as shown in the picture of Tiny by Refsal.
5. Shape the tail, or remove it, as chosen. If retained, it should be tapered from about 1/2 the blank width at the rump down to about 1/3 width at about 1/4 inch from the end, then down to the center line. A v tool will be helpful to start carving at the tail mark, but keep in mind that the rump needs to curve toward the tail.
6. Remember, you are flat plane carving. Round the legs and belly with flat knife cuts.
7. If your horse will have a space between the legs, start the opening with a v tool a little below where the chest landmark is for the front legs and just below the tail end for the back legs, following the marked center line. This opening should not be wider than about 1/4 inch at the hoofs. You will finish opening the space as much as you wish, up to all the way through. The upper end of the front opening will slope into the chest in front, and will be across grain, so a curved detail knife or a gouge will be used.
8. Starting at the diagonal line behind the ear, and going to the rump, round to about 1/2 thickness. In the mane area, come in 1/4 to 3/8 inch from the edge and carve the mane to about 1/3 to 1/4 thickness, extending from just behind the ears to a little above the saddle. If your horse will have ears and forelock, you need to rough out that feature now.
9. Carve the head, neck, and chest. The nose should be about 3/8 to 1/2 inch wide, tapering up to the ears area.
10. Look over your work, and use detail knives to clean up areas which need it.
11. Time to go to the paint table. You can finish as you prefer. The Swedish mass produced horses are dipped in a base coat of paint, but you will want to allow your knife work to show. I start by brushing the carving all over with a generous coating of boiled linseed oil, let it rest about an hour, then wipe off any that has not soaked in (be careful to clean off any excess in the low spots). Then I let the carving rest at least overnight. Then paint with the acrylic of your choice, thinned

with water to the consistency of whole milk. About 3 coats will be needed with drying between each coat with a hair dryer. I like pale colors, but many of the Swedish horses are in dark blue or black. After the base painting is thoroughly dried, apply a coat of polyurethane varnish. When that is dry, apply whatever decorations you like, such as flowers. After the decorations have cured, coat the horse with a couple of coats of polyurethane satin varnish (I always use Jo Sonja brand, but other finish coatings such as spray-on work fine.)

Patterns and Illustrations

Attached are photos of horses I have carved, in 3 views, so you can make more blanks. The original sources of the carving patterns for these carvings were as follows: photos 1-3 – pgs 60 61, Whittling Little Folk, Refsal/ 4,5,6 – pg 72, Carving Flat-Plane Style Caricatures, Refsal/ 7,8,9 – pg 74, Carving Flat-Plane..., Refsal/ 10,11,12 – pg 75, Carving Flat-Plane ..., Refsal/ 13,14,15 – Moore Roughouts, Kindred, ND/ 16 – from free images on internet showing a pattern similar to Refsal's Horse 1 showing the layout for traditional decoration and an advertisement from the internet for a carving course in Sweden. Any of these can be enlarged or reduced to provide you with even more possible patterns.

I hope you enjoy learning to flat plane carve these popular Swedish tourist souvenirs as much as I have!