

Making low budget oars better;

*One of our builders sent this write-up and photos on how he took economy oars and made them better. This note-worthy compromise could certainly serve well, especially if those gorgeous \$700 Sitka Spruce oars are on **next** years wish list.*

“These are 7' 6" Caviness "Lam with Grip" oars purchased at Walmart On-Line: \$56 for the pair, delivered to store.

Varnish on the product was very poor quality over raised grain. The blades were very thick, as shown in the first photo (previously sent). The balance was too far outboard. The loom was straight, 1.75" the entire length. The material was said to be "Southern Hardwood." (If anyone knows what that is, I'd like to know.)

Quick and dirty improvements:

1. Stripped varnish and sanded to 120P.
2. Tapered looms on top and bottom, leaving fore and aft portions straight and full size. Tapering with a draw knife, then a spoke shave, and then detailing with a #49 rasp and finally sanding w/ 80P, 120P.
3. Tapered big shoulders on the blades to a fair and a bit more graceful curve with a spoke shave and rasp, then sanded w/ 80P, 120P,
4. Thinned blades with a jack plane to ~3/8" thickness at the edge of the tip, 1/2" thick at the center of the tip. Edge thickness at the top of the shoulders was thinned to ~3/4", and left at about 1.5" at the center. (I would have liked to have gone farther, but without knowing more about the wood, I didn't want to get carried away. If I ever do this again, I'll go for thinner, particularly up around the shoulders of the blade.) Touched up some tear-out with a scraper.
5. The faces of the tips were glassed with two layers of 4 oz. and epoxy, up two inches. Glassed the tip edge the next day. It got (left-over) 6 oz two inches up the edges. This left a good, sharp edge at the tip for clean vortex separation.
6. Sanded all to 220P, epoxy clear coated (105/207), three coats, sanded to 320P between coats.
7. Stitched on (soaked) leathers with waxed polyamide twine, rubbed seams.
8. Tacked on leather buttons with copper tacks.

Steps 1-4 and the first part of step 5 took about two hours (including sharpening tools and clean-up), Did the sanding of step 6 before glassing the edge of the tip, and applied the first coat of epoxy down to the very edge of the tip not quite touching the freshly laid glass. Overnight cure allowed sanding the next morning with application of the second coat and final sanding and the final finish coat of epoxy that same evening. (Gummed up a couple of sheets of sandpaper for sanding such green epoxy, but it

saved a day of waiting.) *[editor's note: sanding epoxy when not fully cured is a health hazard and you will get better results if you wait for it to cure and then sand before the gloss coat]*

Soaked the pre-sized and pre-punched leather in tap water for ~ 2 hours. Held one end in place with blue tape while starting stitching from the other. With two curved needles, used a baseball stitch. Stitches were pushed into the leather surface with a seam rubber. Pulled the edges together along the way. Started the button with a copper tack through the end of a soaked strip, went around 2.5 times. Added three more tack around the circumference of the completed wraps. Let it dry out. Because the leather shrinks as it dries, the seams are tight and the edges are about 2-3 mm apart. As long as the materials don't get chafed too badly, the leathers ain't going anywhere.

My apprentice, Dr. Mom, approves. “



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