

[Some Crucial Points To Consider Before Purchasing Your First Straight Razor](#)

With the renewed popularity of straight razors goes a problem: what should a man consider when making that important first purchase? This article lists a few points to keep in mind before making this important decision.

Straight razors are undoubtedly making a steady comeback for a variety of reasons. Problems can arise, however, as the internet particularly is full of 'bargains' and 'great buys' that, without a little knowledge on the buyer's part, may not be such fantastic buys after all. If you are considering purchasing, try reading this article first - it could save you time, money and frustration.

New razors. There are really only two volume makers of new straight razors now operating; these are Dovo of Germany and Thiers-Issard of France. Both make a wide range of straight razors at a range of prices to suit most pockets, though they are, unsurprisingly, more expensive than restored and shave-ready vintage models.

From either supplier consider spending at least 60 GBP/\$120 in order to get a decent 'starter' razor. I am frequently asked if carbon steel is better than stainless steel for the blade - my answer is that, in use, there is not a great deal of difference but carbon steel is generally accepted as being easier to care for from the owner's point of view. Choice of scale (handle) material is a matter of personal taste and budget and this aspect of straight razors is purely aesthetic - they shave just the same regardless of what the scales are made of!

There are of course many other makers, ranging from top-class artisan specialists who create true one-off works of art through small makers who also produce absolutely first-class pieces, to cheaper German-made razors and lastly through models originating in such places as Pakistan and China. I would advise avoiding the last two due to noted problems of continuity of steel quality and general lack of craftsmanship. The cheap German razors are also products to be wary of, though some are perfectly fine. Use the old, general rule of thumb: you get what you pay for!

Vintage razors. These are the pieces left from yesteryear, as used by our grandfathers (and theirs) going back some two hundred and fifty years as recognisable shaving tools. They fall into two very broad camps, these being -

Wedge razors. So called because, when viewed in cross-section, the blade is a noticeable wedge-shape from spine to edge - just like a slim wedge of cake. These were used from about 1740 right through until around 1870, when the hollow-ground blade (see below) began to replace them. They are, generally, heavy, stiff blades, usually with a curve to their length and quite large. They changed relatively little in their design during all the years of production, though cosmetic additions came and went as with all fashion.

Many straight razor users (myself included), like wedge-bladed razors, though for a newcomer they can be a little intimidating. My advice is this: if you would like to start off with a wedge blade, get one that is in good condition, from a reputable dealer and shave-ready - they are not the easiest of razors for a learner to re-hone! Famous names to look out for are - Wade & Butcher, Hunter, Joseph Allen and George Wostenholm, to name but a few of these long-gone companies. The second type of vintage razor is -

The hollow-ground razor. So called because the blade, again in cross-section, is ground concavely - that is, with a definite inner-facing curve to the length of the blade. This allows the blade to be much lighter and more flexible than the wedge blade and gained rapid popularity, though interestingly enough they are no sharper than wedge blades - though they are easier to care for, being generally straight along their length. This arrangement is also usually much easier to maintain on the hone and strop. Notable names include Edgar Allen, T. R. Cadman, Wostenholm, Taylors and Wragg from England, From the USA Genco, Case and Remington and from Germany Gotta, Dorko and almost any blade made in Solingen.

A good size to look out for as a starter razor is a '5/8' - this being the distance, measured in eighths of an inch, from the spine or back of the razor to its edge. All razors are measured in this fashion, the narrowest being normally '3/8' and going up generally speaking to '8/8' - a full inch deep. Bigger razors are available but they are really beyond the scope of this article and the beginner would be wise to ignore them, being much harder to handle and also tending to be rather expensive!

Again, it does pay to try to obtain your razor in shave-ready condition from a specialist dealer rather than buy it from a garage sale or off an auction site simply because it's cheap - it may well be a 'find' but may equally well be a 'lemon', requiring lots of work to make it usable - if this can in fact be achieved. One of the main reasons for men abandoning their decision to change to a straight razor is getting a poor-quality one in the first place and becoming disillusioned when the blade blunts quickly and won't shave well because it is poor steel or simply badly prepared - and they're left with a red, sore face still full of stubble!

To summarise: always buy, if possible, a shave-ready razor and always from a good dealer. Choose a known name maker for a new razor or - with a

little searching for information on the internet - a good vintage maker from a reputable dealer, again shave-ready. These decisions could well make the difference between your becoming a 'straight' expert and throwing the thing in a bathroom drawer in disgust and returning - heaven forbid! - to the multi-blade wilderness of disposable cartridge throw-aways - and we don't want that, do we?

About the Author

For more information on shave-ready straight razors, take a look at [The Invisible Edge](#) for information about Vintage models or visit [Dovo Razors UK](#) to see brand-new models.

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