



Nirey KE-500 Electric Knife Sharpener

We review the most versatile, effective Nirey sharpener ever.

NIREY'S wholesalers in Australia, Total Knife Care (TKC), supply professional-grade Nirey KE-280 Electric knife sharpeners to every Coles butchery in the country since 2012, to keep all their boning and slicing knives as sharp as they need to be. They are a timesaving measure, allowing greater productivity in busy shops. If pro butchers like Nireys, when they all learnt the skills to use stones, then who am I to argue?

Now Nirey has introduced a step up in professional sharpeners with the KE-500, which conveniently uses the same aluminium-oxide impregnated circular belts as the forerunner KE-3000 and KE-280 models. In outward appearance and size, the KE-500 looks similar to the others, except for a black and off-white body, but it is a significant upgrade for a few reasons.

- Professional grade 110-Watt motor running wheels at 2500 RPM.

- Quieter operation due to a gearing upgrade. (A blessing IMO)
- Incorporation of new safety guards to protect the belts.
- Low maintenance requirements and inexpensive replacement belts.
- Sharpens a greater length of the blade due to blade-wheel interface design.
- No set up time is required.
- Incorporates two stainless steel removable bottom trays – a bit like many toasters – to remove build-ups of dust from use.
- Allows two edge angle settings of 15 and 22.5 to 35 degrees by use of interchangeable angle guides, marked “1” (finer 15 degrees) and “2” (coarser 22.5-plus degrees). You can alter the angle on the No2 guide by angling the blade inboard or outboard when drawing the knife through. Other Nireys offer one fine angle only, but now users have the flexibility to put a tougher, broader edge on thicker blades e.g. cleavers or bowie-style knives. There are some hunters and fishermen who actually prefer a standard broader angle on the knives

they break down carcasses or fillet with because, while not as hair-splittingly sharp, their edges are more durable on tough tasks.

THE NITTY GRITTY. Now when I start to use any new electronic sharpener, I do so very gingerly, due to 2500RPM abrasives contacting thin steel. Donning safety glasses, I proceeded to go at a thin I.O.Shen kitchen knife on the No1 angle guide and it came up paper-slicing sharp after two strokes per side – to be fair, it had been through my KE-280 a month before and is steeled daily. Then I dragged out a couple of Ridgeline Svord knives, which needed a touch up and I started with the No2, but found I preferred the No1. In order to straighten up any slight wire edge, I just use an old butchers steel gently and the knives cut like lasers.

Like other Nireys you start off with a moderately firm downward pressure for a few strokes and then lighten up with three or four successive strokes on both sides. This has the effect of grinding a convex-style edge, which is more polished at the business end.

Now Nirey says you can finely polish your knife edges

after profiling by swapping out a finer grade of belt. If you purchase the sharpener alone, this is a slightly onerous task as it involves removal of the cover, taking a belt off the only set of wheels and replacing with a finer belt. No drama if you have a stack of knives to do all at one time. You can avoid all this if you pay slightly more for a KE-500 in kit form, with spare wheels and belts (as well as cleaning brush and neat carry case) swapping out is more practical.

Aimed at the higher end of the recreational and commercial markets, the KE 500 is a top-class addition to the Nirey range and carries a small premium in price over the veteran KE-280. But, as I observed to TKC's Scott Thornton, who told me that seven years of Coles butchery use and not one KE-280 has come back, “Mate, you are doing yourself out of repeat business if they are so high-quality as to be indestructible.” His no-doubt grinning reply was, “It’s just a cross I have to bear, Marcus.”

You can purchase Nirey and other fine products from TKC online if you go to their website at www.totalknifecare.com.au or call them at 1300 650 656. ☒

ON THIS SPREAD

1 The Nirey KE-500 kit with all inclusions and knives I sharpened for this review.

2 The Kit includes inclusions and carry case.

3 The business interface of grinding wheels and angle guide. New belts rip steel away quickly but soon settle in for polished edges.

4 Nirey's new dust trays, which assist greatly with housekeeping for the unit.

6 The two angle overexposed to highlight the difference in angles. No1 (left) for fine edge angles and No2 for coarser angles more than 22 degrees.

5 A compact footprint but an effective tool.

