

Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog gives some answers to readers' questions

Safe passage

Question: Any suggestions on how to ship fragile items? I use postal shipping as well as the usual package services.

Answer: I can share a few tips I've gained that have helped me get fragile items through the shipping systems intact.

Depending on the fragility – for example, I often ship pierced eggshell ornaments – it pays to double-box your items. By properly padding and packaging your item(s) inside a box then padding and packaging that box inside a larger box, you have done a good job of protecting your shipment from impact shocks. Remember, it isn't the fall that breaks things, it is the sudden stop. Providing for a softer and slower 'landing' will help fragile items survive.

The inner package doesn't need to be bullet-proof since it shouldn't see the direct contact or mechanical abuse that outside packaging receives. I favour wadded-up tissue paper for the inner box padding and will use Styrofoam peanuts for the outer box padding material. Because my turnings are rather fragile and pretty small, I put my inner pack in low-cost, throwaway kitchen food leftover storage containers. I also make use of

cardboard cores for industrial printers and plastic drink packaging.

Obviously, larger items and those less fragile than pierced eggshell ornaments can go into a cardboard box as the inner container. You can upscale the entire process based on the size of your shipped item(s). The inner package really only provides the support around your goods for containment in the larger package. I always secure the outside packaging with indestructible sealing tapes. To prevent the accidental piercing of seals, I use fibreglass reinforced tape. While it's expensive, so little needs to be used that I find it worthwhile. A few strips placed strategically seal the box and then can be over-covered with the less expensive, commonly used clear packaging tape. It also works well as simple tamper-evident packaging.

I am torn about insurance. I always take the full amount of the no-cost insurance but opt out of additional value. Insuring does give the impression that the carrier is responsible and should willingly treat your package more carefully, but

if you've ever tried to collect a claim, you know what a joke it is. I've always given up after they put you through the ringer intentionally to wear you down and make you go away. Also, to insure for the true value of your materials and time, your premium will be pretty hefty. Playing the odds over the long haul, I find my rare losses are still ahead of the game when compared to the insurance costs. Marking packages 'fragile' without taking additional coverage might only be challenging any malcontents working somewhere in the system to try to break things. You decide.

When I am travelling by air and shipping fragile items in baggage – whether turnings, supplies, or expensive piercing tools – I pack them into industrial containers such as Pelican cases or equivalent. Since I'll be returning with my same tools etc., the cases will accompany me on the journey home. As needed, even with the foam interiors, I will pad and double-box items of extreme fragility or keep them in my carry-on computer bag.



I use much higher-cost tape such as fibreglass reinforced in a few areas for needed strength, then use the traditional clear plastic strapping tape over top



For fragile items, I double-pack in an assortment of boxes, plastic packaging, cardboard tubes etc. using wadded tissue paper for the inner packaging process

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT HERTZOG

By the book

Question: I am thinking about writing a book on woodturning. There seem to be plenty of turning books around at the retailers but none that I think cover what I'd like to write about. I'm sure there are ins and outs about the publishing world. Do you have any advice on book authoring?

Answer: While I've had more than 180 woodturning articles published, my experience with books is very limited. Years ago, I had a publisher offer what I found out later was, by comparison to most, a pretty attractive contract for a book. At the time, I had three columns that were being published every issue in different magazines so I never pursued it. Over the years, I have done a bit of digging when thinking about a book but haven't gone farther.

I can offer some advice from my own digging and from friends who have authored woodturning and non-woodturning books. Don't do it to get wealthy. Your financial take after all is said and done, is usually pretty meagre when compared to the time and effort required. Whether you deal with an established publisher or self-publish, it is a large undertaking. Self-publishing, while seeming to be more financially attractive, puts the entire monkey on your back, from writing and illustrating to editing, printing, marketing, distributing, and more. In established publishers, there are big and small, generic and speciality, decent and not-so, as

well as flim-flam in the mix. I suggest you avoid the vanity press operations. BTW, GMC, the parent of *Woodturning Magazine*, has a book publishing division.

You don't say what your topic is, so I'm assuming you intend to keep it quiet for now to avoid competition. Regardless of your topic, remember you are playing to a niche market with very limited distribution and will have competition from tools and equipment for every discretionary dollar. Your topic and book will need to be pretty good to pry money from the wallets of woodturners. My closing suggestion is to follow this path because you love it and want to share. Any fame or financial reward will likely be minimal or non-existent. If you find you are serious, get in touch with any of the authors of books in the woodturning field that you've found helpful to learn the ropes. I'm certain they will give you their recommended dos and don'ts that they've learned along the way. Please don't confuse my comments as talking you out of writing, only to help you go into it with your eyes wide open.



My local woodcraft store has a better-than-most selection of woodworking and woodturning titles yet only a small number are dedicated to turning.



Even in a well-stocked woodworking book rack, only 20 or so of the 200-odd books are woodturning titles

Stay sharp

Question: I'm not very good at sharpening yet and my tools get discoloured at the ends where I grind. My turning friends make fun of them and tell me I'm damaging things. They seem to cut well and I think they are just funning me. Am I damaging them?

Answer: I'm wondering if your friends might lend a hand helping you improve your sharpening skills. Perhaps you might ask them for assistance. You don't say what kind of steel your tools are made of. Unless they are the hardly in circulation any longer carbon steel, you're fine. Once you get to high-speed steel and beyond, you can make the tools look pretty ugly at the grinder without damaging the steel. Your comment about cutting well is really the key. If the tools are properly sharpened and cut well, then you have succeeded. Now you need to develop the art of touching up a tool. Without waiting until a tool is cutting poorly, a quick trip to the grinder for a 'touching up' will never degrade the tool or discolour the steel. While I doubt you have the older, rarely-found carbon steel tools, do know that excessive heat from grinding can damage the temper of those tools. Regardless of the ribbing from your buddies, developing your sharpening skills can only enhance your turning enjoyment and accomplishments.



For HSS and beyond, if your tool is shaped correctly and cuts well, you can accept any unsightly heating discoloration as cosmetic only

Send your questions to Kurt's email: kurt@kurthertzog.com