

# Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers some readers' questions

## Lathe horsepower options

**Question: I am shopping for a new lathe and am puzzling about the horsepower options. The standard offerings have a certain horsepower and, for added money, I can get an 'upgrade' to a more powerful motor. Should I spend the extra money?**

**Answer:** I trust you are looking at a full-sized lathe as most minis or midis I'm aware of don't usually offer horsepower options. For the full-sized lathes, the optional horsepower choices will be of value if you intend to do 'more strenuous turning'. If your typical turning project includes heavy blanks or odd-shaped and somewhat unevenly weighted materials, the added horsepower can help swing those blanks properly, especially at the low-end speeds. The added torque is very handy when making heavy or demanding cuts. Often, time is very important to the production turner so heavier, more demanding cuts are widely used. If your work doesn't include logs, over-sized bowl blanks, large wall hangings or architectural turnings, you can usually do nicely with the standard offering. The manufacturer has planned for sufficient power for the more common, typical needs user. That said, if the price difference is reasonable, you may wish to upgrade for two reasons. The added horsepower will never be a detraction and perhaps be more desirable to the next potential owner if you ever decide to sell the lathe. In my shop, every lathe I have purchased new has the most horsepower available and I haven't regretted the decision. Do remember that upsizing your motor will increase your electrical requirements,



Unevenly weighted blanks such as this large, natural-edge bowl blank will benefit with plenty of horsepower used for low-rpm turning

so be certain your machine location has adequate electrical capacity for whatever lathe power you select in case you require additional to be installed to that location.

## Proper instruction

**Question: I am still learning my woodturning skills and often watch YouTube videos for new instruction. Some of the videos puzzle me and I'm not certain whether I should put much stock in their techniques. How can I know whether any particular video is really proper instruction?**

**Answer:** You have touched on two interesting points. First, we are all learning and there isn't an end point in my opinion. That is what makes woodturning enjoyable and interesting. Regardless of your skills and accomplishments, you can always add to them. On the matter of the YouTube videos... One of the biggest problems I find with Youtube instruction is the number of 'hacks' who are wonderful presenters and can dazzle folks with poor and often dangerous techniques. Mixed among the woodturning videos available are real gems from some of the best teachers there are. Discriminating between them is difficult, especially for the less experienced turners. I recommend that you shy away from those who do the razzle-dazzle kind of presentations and focus on those who present in a methodical, build-on-the-basics type of instruction. I also suggest that when you see videos with a sales pitch included, whether subtle or blatant, you immediately get wary of the presenter. I know everyone needs to make a living but, for the most part, those providing YouTube content have a day job and don't rely on pitching products or services in their online video content. When you have seen other publications by a YouTube creator, you can usually put more credence in their instruction. Those names you recognise as authors for magazine or book publications or names you recognise as demonstrators for the various woodturning symposia have been vetted far more than anything YouTube does for their content providers. Another

source for material evaluation is the AAW's search feature of YouTube materials. The American Association of Woodturners ([www.woodturner.org](http://www.woodturner.org)) search function provides results of materials that have been screened from the safety perspective of woodturning. YouTube is an incredible resource for all walks of life but sorting the wheat from the chaff is left to the viewer. Don't forget your most important source of opinions and learning is your local turning chapter, club, or woodturning retailer.



**AAW Explore! and VideoSource have been combined into one quick and easy search tool!**

• Locate woodturning articles, information, projects, and tips from AAW's complete archive of publications dating back to 1986.  
• Search a wide selection of curated woodturning videos that have been pre-screened for quality content and safety.

Search now!

Author	Title
Category	Keywords
Type	Select a Category

The AAW's video search function covers 30 years of educational materials and much online content it has screened for safety and good practices

## Enough of pens

**Question: I had become smitten with turning pens. With all of my friends and workmates wanting them, I am spending too much time making these at the expense of other turnings. I'm also getting bored since they are quite simple to turn. You've done a lot of pens, what do you suggest?**



Add to your repertoire by creating your own pen designs without kits and including unique stands

**Answer:** I think your question involves two separate issues. First, how do you get out of the mode of being the pen supplier for all the folks in your various circles? Second, you've become proficient enough to bang out the standard kit pens and aren't being sufficiently challenged. What can you do to create some woodturning growth challenges?

On the being the pen producer side, you can begin charging a fair price for your work. Giving the pens away or recouping only your out-of-pocket expense would never cut it in business. You need to price your work as you would if you needed to pay all of the bills from your pen sales: kits, woods, adhesives, consumables, packaging, equipment depletions, utilities, insurance, etc. Even if you ignore markup for profit, training, health insurance, retirement, advertising, throughput loss, and other typical business expenses, and only charge out-of-pocket materials and a

nominal hourly wage, you'll thin the herd considerably. Everyone is glad to receive or 'buy' a pen for free or a ridiculously low price. When the price is a bit more realistic, you'll be amazed how much the demand will fall off.

As far as challenges, your falloff in pen demand based on realistic pricing should yield more lathe time for other items. Depending on your interests, you can take on just about anything that your equipment allows. Obviously 16in salad bowls may be out of your range if you only own a mini-lathe but all else is fair game. Regardless of your lathe size, ornaments, bowls or platters sized for your equipment capabilities, lidded boxes, toys, and a host of other turnings await you.

You can drive the pen demand falloff with prices or just move on and do other things. Let your friends know you now are into 'fill in your new interest(s)'

yourself and head down that path. That said, if you wish to be challenged with pens, there are many things you can do in that arena. If you haven't already, you can begin to decorate your pens with painting, pyrography, piercing, inlay, other materials (precious metal clay, polymer clay, plastics, metals, resin castings, subsurface images, and more). In addition to creating your own blanks, you can make your pens without any kits or kit parts. Branch out and create unique pen stands or presentation boxes to go along with your pens. There really isn't a limit should you wish to stick with pens. As with any turning interest or topic, you can not only enhance your own skills by branching out, including other creative art forms, but also collaborate with others who may have skills you admire but will never possess. Together you can accomplish great things building on your collaborator's skill sets.

Send your questions to Kurt's email: [kurt@kurthertzog.com](mailto:kurt@kurthertzog.com)