

Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT HERTZOG

1 Rpm can be deceptive. What is important is surface feet per minute. The larger the turning, the slower the speed since, at the outer diameter, it is really moving **2** When planning your machine needs, always consider what your standard mix of turnings is but also what you may grow into

I'm thinking about upgrading my midi lathe, which runs at 3250rpm, to a full-sized lathe but I'm just not sure if 2000rpm is fast enough.

The good rule of thumb for safe and effective rpm, as taught by the late Dale Nish, is $\text{rpm} \times \text{diameter (inches)} = 6000 \text{ to } 9000$. Obviously, if all your work will be pens and lace bobbins, you'll have good use for a high-rpm machine, although you probably wouldn't need to upsize your lathe if you were mostly doing those types of turnings. If you will be turning work of larger diameter, whether spindle or faceplate, you can run the maths and decide if 2000rpm will be a somewhat limiting factor in your work. Since you are considering upsizing your lathe to full size, you must need the capability for larger, or longer, work. If your typical work is usually greater than 3ins in diameter, your 2000rpm might be adequate.





3

3 When accepting commission work, be certain that sufficient non-refundable advance monies are collected. If cancelled, will the work be easily sold to others?

I had a customer place an expensive order with me weeks ago. Their piece is near completion. I just got an email to cancel the order completely. Out the blue with no explanation. They just want a refund. What would you do in this situation?

There are many issues involved here. I can't answer for you, but I can suggest some things to think about before deciding. First and foremost, did you quote a delivery date and are you meeting it? Do your paperwork, order forms, website, or other manner of custom work document the details of your cancellation policy? Are time limits for cancellation, indicated loss of deposit monies, or other clearly stated penalties indicated for late cancellation? Are they within any of those time limits? Can their order be sold to another customer without too much time or money lost? Are they a good past or potentially future repeat customer? Of course, you may not want them back. I can't answer for you but, in my opinion, unless you stand to lose a lot in the way of sunk cost, be stuck with a likely long-sitting difficult saleable product,

or other big setback, I'd seriously consider accepting their cancellation. Refusal poses the potential trashing you'd receive at their hands among their circles, your current/potential customers, and certainly alienating them forever. Hopefully all of this can be avoided. This good gesture, along with your peace of mind by just walking away, will likely be worth your loss, providing it is minor or bearable. Having a well-documented and understood cancellation policy is always key. Delivery date commitments, along with a large percentage (non-refundable) upfront order deposit on custom work will usually minimise these situations. With no reason from them regarding their cancellation, it is difficult to feel any compassion regarding any change of heart or possible payment difficulties. Of course, if you fail on your side of the order contract, i.e., delivery dates, committed features/function, or other stated deliverable, the monkey is always on your back to make an agreeable compromise or allow full refund. Personally, I'd try to get some explanation for the cancellation just for curiosity's sake and weigh the questions above before I decided.



4 As a beginner, individual or small group classes on fundamentals is highly recommended. Get those basics properly with over-the-shoulder guidance **5** After you've gotten a sound set of the fundamentals to build upon, you can take advantage of video or remote learning of specialty interests **6** I most often turn my pens on my mid-size lathe. I find that I'll use its speed capability from a from a few 100 up to around 3000rpm at various stages of work

I just purchased a lathe and tools and have never turned before. Are online classes reliable or should I find a real-life class to learn everything? Or will YouTube suffice?

Congratulations on your start in woodturning. I hope your purchase is going to serve your needs as you envision them now. I highly recommend that you get some in-person instruction right at the start. Learning the safe methods of work mounting, speeds and feeds, tool sharpening, and basics of woodturning (ABCs) are key skills to obtain immediately. Without learning them correctly at the beginning, you'll likely engrain bad habits that can range from very dangerous to you, anyone or thing nearby, or your tools/equipment. Seek out a local club. Depending on your location, there is likely one quite nearby that welcomes newcomers. Most will let you visit several times before joining and the joining cost will likely be your best turning investment. Most clubs have teaching programmes, mentor programmes, or other methods to get you started safely and efficiently. Nothing beats having an experienced teacher immediately at hand getting you started safely and with sound fundamentals to build upon. Self-taught turners are like self-taught golfers. Try to unlearn that horrific slice or hook after you've developed it and made it rote! Later in your turning progression, you can add speciality techniques, projects, and tool usage via online, video, or YouTube teaching. This is after you've learned the basics and have a good control of them. The caution I always share regarding online learning is to be cautious. For everyone on the internet who is a very capable and competent turner/teacher, there are as many or more self-professed experts who are detrimental or unsafe. It is imperative that you be able to ferret those people out. With good, safe basic skills, you'll have a far greater ability to see through self-professed experts who are blowing smoke.

I am just wondering – is 2000rpm fast enough for pen turning?

My short answer is both yes and no. There are people who make very nice turnings on pole and treadle lathes. Perhaps not usually pens but beautiful turnings. Turning pens at 2000rpm is certainly doable but, in my opinion, less than ideal. I trust you won't be finishing pens with rub and buff, so sharp tools and light touch will let you make pens at 2000rpm max if you must. To expand somewhat, if you are only going to do pens, I think I'd much rather have a lathe capable of higher rpm. My minis say they will spin at 3900 max. That is on the highest pulley ratio at the highest speed control setting. Perhaps I've gone that absolute max rpm, but probably not or rarely. I don't really pay attention to rpm numbers. I turn up the dial to go as fast as is safe, get rid of material quickly, and yet provide a quality cut. That is how I select my speed. It is changed often, using the same methodology, depending on the turning function, whether roughing, detailing, sanding, finishing, or any special need based on the tool being used. I most often turn pens on my 12in lathe, which has a 50-2000 and 100-4000rpm set of pulleys. I am often frustrated when I go to max rpm on the speed dial and can't go as fast as I want because I'm on the slow speed pulleys left from turning something far larger. A move to the high range pulleys for pens, I'm never at the top but I'm certainly well above 2000rpm. If you run Dale Nish's formula as mentioned, a 1/2in pen blank would run between 3000 and 4500 as a maximum safe turning speed. When I sand, the speed goes way, way down, so max speed is never an issue there. If you are going to turn other items with pens only a part of your mix, you'll need to pay attention to the Q&A above and run the maths with your mix. With bowls, platters, lidded boxes, etc. in the range of 3in or more, 2000rpm would be more than serviceable. You could live with a limit of 2000rpm if you only turned pens, but I'm pretty sure you'd be disappointed. You make the call based on your balance of work and their sizes.