

Making the Most of Your Mini-Lathe With John Horn

When you are first exploring woodturning, I recommend that you concentrate on small projects for a minimum of several months and preferably a year or more before you even think about going into bigger items necessitating a larger lathe. The advantages of this approach are numerous. A mini-lathe is highly recommended as your first lathe. Then, if and when you get a larger lathe, the mini-lathe may be used for a multitude of tasks which may not be convenient on the larger lathe.

A Mini-Lathe is loosely defined as a small lathe that is transportable with a swing of 12 inches or under and an undefined length between centers. As a person surveys the lathes on the market, the definition seems rather blurry as to the real definition of a mini-lathe but the main criterion seems that a mini-lathe should be easily portable.

Why you need a mini-lathe

1. The cost of materials is much less than larger projects.
2. Small items allow you develop your tool technique better than larger ones.
3. Small projects take less time than larger ones.
4. If you blow up a small piece of wood, you are much less likely to be hurt than with larger pieces.
5. All the tool techniques you use on small items easily transfer to the larger pieces, but the reverse is not necessarily true.
6. If you lose interest at some point and want to dispose of your equipment, a bigger portion of your investment can be recovered with a small lathe than a larger lathe.
7. The Mini Lathe is very portable and can be used in various locations when you go on vacation or you participate with a local woodturning chapter in an activity that needs the members to bring a small lathe as a part of the event.
8. A large variety of accessories may be fitted to the mini-lathe which augments its usefulness.

9. Even if you own a large lathe, a mini-lathe is a useful tool to handle jobs that would require additional setup time if you owned only one lathe.
10. The cost of the mini-lathe is much less than a larger one.

Items you can make to improve the versatility or convenience of your mini-lathe:

1. Handle for the tail stock adjustment lever
2. Wooden # 2 Morris Taper Glue Block for holding small objects
3. Face plates made from hardware store nuts
4. Shop made Sanding Disk
5. Traveling Buffing and Grinding System - http://www.woodcentral.com/cgi-bin/readarticle.pl?dir=turning&file=articles_889.shtml
6. Pen Press
7. Various sizes and shapes of jam chucks
8. Modified paint roller as a buffing device
9. Shop made drum sanders of any diameter fitted to the lathe by a Morris taper or chucked to the lathe with a tenon

Accessories which may be purchased to improve the performance of the lathe:

1. Buffing system
2. Wire Brush
3. Fan (Fan blades chucked in the headstock)
4. Four jaw chuck with several sets of jaws
5. Jacobs chuck, 1/2 inch capacity, with draw bar
6. Flex shaft for rotary carving
7. Rotary burrs
8. Steady rest for thin spindles
9. Small captured tool system for end grain hollowing
10. Table saw * although possible, not recommended

11. Vacuum chucking system (See the SWAT demo by Tkacs and Solberg)

12. Wobble Doll for vibration detection