

On Saturday April 16th Mike Ramsey and I asked the rest of the South Texas Woodturners club to join us in an ongoing discussion on sharpening bowl gouges. There are many sharpening recommendations out there of which no two seem to be the same so we made no further recommendations. What we did do was ask the members to bring examples of their favorite gouges and tell us why it was a favorite.

The first question to the group was, “what is sharp?” and all seemed to agree that it is when the tool is really cutting well. OK, tell me more! We moved on to discussing some of the many variables involved such as species of the wood, wet or dry, end grain or side grain along with condition of the wood, knots, and the like. According to Dave Hout on a video the club got from SWAT, each individual needs to match the bevel to several factors including their height and

the way they stand before the lathe along with their experience as a turner. A well known teacher and demonstrator Dave also says that there is no perfect bevel to fit everyone. I want to make sure it is clear that each turner needs to find what works BEST for him or her. So we set out to examine the samples we had.

Five members brought 2 to 3 gouges each so we passed them around and discussed the what's and whys of each grind. Each tool had a bevel of 45 to 60 degrees with one that had a double bevel. We also had one tool that had about a 35 degree bevel that was like driving a sports car with slick tires on a wet street. The side grind was where the real difference was seen among the samples. It was interesting that each person's grind was necessary for them to maintain control of the tool while in a cut yet everyone could not control all the samples we had. It seems that everyone had experienced the frustration of maintaining a consistent grind even when using a jig.

Mike and I shared with the club our experience with a system written about in American Woodturners by Kirk DeHeer in the winter of 2006 issue. DeHeer has designed a template to use on a Wolverine jig that will enable the user to come much closer to a consistent grind every time. In the article he provides templates for 40, 45, and 50 degree bevels that provide the same bevel every time and with a much quicker set up. For more details see the article in American Woodturner mentioned above beginning on page 32. I have been very successful and pleased with the 50 degree bevel as has Mike.

It needs to be mentioned that even with one of the many jigs on the market and a template for accurate set up there is other care that needs to be taken to achieve the best grind. The jig when set up correctly will maintain the bevel but the shape of the grind remains the responsibility of the one doing the sharpening. Also nothing can take the place of a good grinder and correct and correctly cared for grinding wheels.

Doing is usually better than talking so a mesquite log was chucked up in James's 2436 Oneway for trying the different gouges. Mike was the first one to try and he tried all the gouges we had collected by hollowing and shaping the outside. In fact he did such a good job of testing we had to chuck up another log so our host and president James Anderson could do some sampling of the gouges.

For those who were interested in examining the different grinds the 50 degree grind using DeHeer's template and a Wolverine jig seemed to be best accepted as sharp and controllable. Many of us who love to turn yet lack what ever it is that allows for free-hand sharpening of tools are fortunate to have those things which aid in sharpening a tool that will cut and can be controlled. It is also great that there are so many experienced turners willing to help others enjoy making piles of chips. That leads to another question; what is more important? What we make or how deep the pile of chips on the floor is?

We certainly did not solve all the sharpening problems in a short time on one Saturday morning but some of us walked away with the hope we were making progress, and confidence goes a long way toward getting a sharp tool to do what we want. In that same winter issue of American Woodturner starting on page 60 is an article by Lyle Jamieson that also gives insight into how to enjoy turning even more and he reminds us to start with sharp tools.

Don Jones