

BE SAFE - Safety Tip of the Month (Gary Guenther)

Sizing the final nib – it's not a contest!

I call it a 'nib'. You may call it a nub or nubbin -- I'm sure there are many other names for it. Whatever you call it, I'm talking about that thin little cylinder of wood that connects the foot of your nominally-completed turning to the waste material supporting it at the tail/live center point. For those of us who complete the foot by reverse turning with the work piece between a jam chuck and the tail center (rather than using a vacuum chuck, donut ("Straka") chuck, jumbo or "Cole" jaws with rubber grips, Longworth chuck, or other such), this is our final cut. When we're done, we saw or carve it off and sand the end smooth. That's the way many of us have been taught, and we do it in preference to the flashier way the pros zip the completed piece off and catch it while it is still spinning. The problem is that if you try to make the nib too thin, you'll be trying to catch the piece anyway, and, sadly, it will probably now have some kind of nasty mark on it. Don't ask me how I know.

So what's this got to do with safety? Well, when that unnecessarily-thin nib breaks unexpectedly, you'll be very frustrated and may be prone to reacting without thinking and doing something stupid like trying to catch the piece before you turn the lathe off. In such a case, your finger might just graze the spinning chuck, and... you get the idea.

All of this unpleasantness (and blood) can all be avoided very simply by not trying to get the diameter of the nib down to the very last millimeter. You're going to have to sand the end of it down anyway, so its size isn't really all that important as long as it's smaller than any feature ring you wanted to add to the foot. The nib is weak, in general, because it is under a certain amount of longitudinal pressure from the tailstock, not to speak of the side pressure from the tool. It is particularly weak if you are turning your piece in the side-grain orientation.

You know the old saying – "It broke on my last cut." Well of course it did – that's what made you quit. There is a better way. After my last little escapade, I have made a resolution to stop before it breaks! It's not a challenge or a test of skill to get the smallest possible nib. Leave that extra millimeter uncut and just say "enough is enough". Smile and remove your nearly-completed piece without that big mark from where it hit the tool rest or the live center point. Believe me, you'll be much happier in the long run. I know I will.