

A poor man's coring tool – the Sorby Slicer

I turn mostly local “waste” wood, and I have more of that than I know what to do with, so I don't feel like I can justify the cost of a McNaughton coring system. But I like the idea of saving the occasional core rather than turning it into a wasteful pile of shavings. I was introduced to the ‘answer’ at a CAW demo by JoHannes Michelsen.

He was working on a hat, and his first step is to make/save a mirror frame by cutting away, in one piece, the large chunk of wood that surrounds the to-be hat brim. Hannes likes to have fun, and I have to admit to being favorably impressed by his “lance” (see photo) from aspects of both showmanship and practicality. The tool is basically a very large, heavy parting tool, with a long handle, that is used to slice the unwanted wood away.



I'm not sure what exact parting tool Hannes was using, but the tool made specifically for this purpose is the Sorby “Slicer” (TCT Slicer RS205). This is an unhandled, 15” long, 3/4” diameter steel rod that tapers down at the nose to hold a hollow-ground (fluted) carbide tip that allows plunge cuts to remove cones from bowls or vessels. See www.robert-sorby.co.uk/pdf/RS2000.pdf. Craft Supplies has them in stock for \$60 at www.woodturnerscatalog.com. This tool is only cost effective if you already have an arm brace or hollowing system handle that will hold a 3/4” shaft. With the added cost of an arm brace, you might as well buy a coring system that will do an even better job. Sorby recommends the use of a side handle on the arm brace, but I use it without one and have no problem.



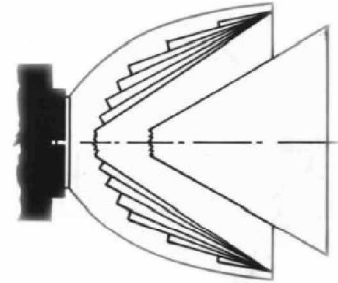
They say that to sharpen the carbide tip, you just run a “credit card” diamond sharpener across the flat top a few times. Unfortunately, in my case, the tool arrived with the plating (nickel? chrome?) on the shaft also covering the cutter (poor planning on their part), and I decided that removing it would be a good idea. That took a lot of added work with the sharpening card.

With a typical bowl blank held on a screw chuck or between centers, if you like, you can first use the slicer, à la Hannes, to remove a mirror frame from the “outside wastage” around the base of the bowl. (It won't be round after it dries!) Or just rough as usual. Add a tenon, reverse into chuck jaws, and cut out a core with your Slicer. You now have the material to make a smaller bowl to match the big one. With practice, it should be quicker to core than to hollow, and you end up with a useful piece of wood instead of a pile of shavings.

I used my Slicer recently for the first time, mounted in my Don Pencil “Scorpion” arm brace. At first, I was a little nervous about using it because a bad catch with an arm brace can injure your arm. It behaved quite well, however, and it quickly became obvious that the tool is reasonably safe. I had nothing even remotely close to a catch. I was careful to work with a slight downward angle (it is a scraper, after all), and I kept the cutter tip working very slightly above center. I approached the cuts with due caution and made sure to keep the kerf double wide by alternating

frequently back and forth on both sides so as not to get into a “bind”. I was also careful to watch my angle and not pinch the cutter from side to side.

I cut at an angle such that when I reached my planned depth (marked with masking tape on the shaft), the base of the cone was still held in place by about 1.5” of wood. I dismantled the still-attached forms from the chuck (it’s better to do this off the lathe, for several reasons) and used a variable-width punch (wider at its base than the width of the kerf) with a couple of hammer blows down the axis to break the center free. [This works easily with a side-grain orientation. It would not work for end grain -- in that case, you would have to cut to a true point to free the core.] I remounted the partly-hollowed bowl in the chuck and proceeded with further hollowing as normal.



The Slicer cut dry cherry wood reasonably well, but I felt that it could probably be sharper, because I had to push a little harder than I would have preferred. I suspect this to be a residual problem caused by the errant plating. I’ll have to work harder on the sharpening the next time I use it. I expect that it would have cut wet wood much more easily and quickly.

Overall, on the basis of only this one trial, I’d say that the tool is a success. It wasn’t scary, and I look forward to using it again. Speaking practically, I’ll have to do a lot more cores to get my money’s worth out of it.

*Always use common sense. Things that work in one situation may not work in another. Follow all Safety Rules. If it feels wrong, it probably is; stop and rethink. Your **Mileage May Vary***