

Use of a traditional gouge grind

I have had a 1/2" (American measure – bar diameter) "traditional" bowl gouge with a parabolic flute in my "bag" for about 15 years and never used it because I fell prey to the constant barrage of recommendations for using the Irish grind or the Ellsworth grind or the fingernail grind or the side grind (all similar in concept). It's been on my "list" to try it, but you know how that goes... In the last few months, this tool has been recommended in no fewer than three IRDs by top professional turners – Mike Mahoney, Kirk DeHeer, and Paul Hannaby. Their main use is as a bottom feeder, but Hannaby uses one for the entire inside cut on bowls.



So I ticked the box on my list and tried mine as a bottom feeder, after sharpening it to a 50° bevel angle, per DeHeer and Hannaby (I didn't get a number from Mahoney). Where has this tool been all my life? I got really sweet, long curls from dry wood cutting into endgrain! I'm a convert, hence this article. I normally use a 70° angle for this purpose (generally quite successfully), but this is a revelation. By the way, you don't generally need one with a 5/8" bar – smaller is often better.

A traditional grind (may also be called the "standard" grind by some manufacturers, such as Crown) does not have swept back wings – the business end is straight across, just like all new bowl gouges used to be shipped (and some still are, if they don't have "side" or "fingernail" in the description). That means it has two sharp corners or points on the ends of the cutting flute edge, and, yes, you most certainly don't want those getting into the wood! So a little care is needed -- it's called tool control -- that's a good thing in any case. A quick check on the web shows these readily available from both quality and bargain manufacturers, handled and unhandled, in a very wide price range – just avoid words like "side" and "fingernail".

Important note: It is sharpened like a spindle roughing gouge by just rotating it freehand on the grinder platform with the handle straight back, or, even more simply, with the handle in the Wolverine "pocket". Do not use the Vari-Grind jig. AND, Do Not Use a Spindle Roughing Gouge for any purpose on mixed grain, inside or outside! That's a different tool, and it would be very bloody dangerous! Literally. This is a bowl gouge!

If you're going to use it like Hannaby does to go around the corner, it is important to remove the heel (as you would on any bowl gouge used for "inside" work) so you can get smoothly around curves. Here's a cute sharpening trick. Instead of grinding the bevel you want first and then trying to remove the heel without disturbing the bevel, do it the other way around! First grind a nice curve ending in a somewhat acute angle (compared to your ultimate goal bevel angle) and then add the narrow bevel at the angle you want to use for a particular project. A great idea – very practical.

Give this tool a try, and tell us your experience.

*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***