

An Opinionated Survey of Hollowing Tools-Part III

Detachable and Specialized Handles for Turning Tools

by Lyn J. Mangiameli

Specialty Handles.

Many hollowing tools have the same shaft size. Generally 1/2; 5/8 or 3/4 or their metric approximations (12 or 13 mm, 16 mm, 19 mm). This means that you don't have to have separate handles for each tool, but can usually interchange handles, particularly with a couple of adaptors. Compared to wooden handles, metal handles offer more control of weight and vibration damping, a greater choice of gripping surface and most of all, allow one to adjust how deeply a tool is seated in the handle (thus controlling shaft extension and overall tool balance). Here are my comments on most of the metal handles commercially available to woodturners.

Hamlet Multitool Handles:

[Available separately from Packard Woodworks and from Britain at The ToolPost] I am not fond of Hamlet's hollowing tools, but I really like their handles. They now come in three useful sizes 17 inch, 26 inch and 31 inches in length. I like the grip size (all are 1-3/8 in diameter) and rubber covering of the shafts and that they use two side by side (rather than inline) set screws to hold

the tool shaft (or an adapter) in place. The smaller two handles have a 5/8 inch bore; the new larger size has a 3/4 bore. The shortest comes with 1/4, 3/8 & 1/2 inch adapters, the middle size just has the 3/8 and 1/2 inch sizes of adapter, and the giant size comes only with an adapter to step down to 5/8 inch. These adapters are really handy and greatly increase the versatility of the handles. The adapters will work in any 5/8 interior socket (or 3/4 for the new larger one), so can be useful in many handles other than the Hamlet. My only complaints with these handles is that they are very expensive, not as easily filled with lead shot as some, and the adapters are not available individually.

Woodcut Proforme Handles:

[Likely still available direct from Woodcut] Available with either 1/2 or 5/8 inch interior shafts, the latter used to be standard issue with the Proforme tools, the former is still used with the Woodcut Bowl Saver and is optionally available for the new Woodcut Cup tool. Tool shafts are held by a single set screw placed in the side of the 1-1/16 inch diameter, 13 inch long handle shaft (12-1/4 for 1/2 inch bore model). The shaft is covered for the last 8 inches with a soft, thick, open cell foam handle. This 1-1/2 inch diameter foam handle is very comfortable and allows

good grip resistance to torsional forces. They are my favorite shorter handles when they are loaded with lead shot (which is easily achieved by removing the end plug, fitting an internal plug, and pouring in the shot). Though originally the standard handle offered with the Proforme, they have been replaced by a longer, intermediate length handle, described below.

Woodcut "Promaster 20 inch

Double Ended" handle:

[Available from Craft Supplies and direct from Woodcut] This handle is the latest handle offered by Woodcut for use with their Proforme Shafts. Like most other Woodcut handles, it uses set screws (2 in this case) to secure tools into a 5/8 inch interior bore. This bore is a reduction from the handle's overall internal diameter of approximately 7/8s of an inch, and is achieved by a metal sleeve which also serves to reinforce the mounting area. The handle allows the Proforme and other 5/8 inch shaft diameter hollowing tools to be extended out of the handle for narrow necked smaller scale forms, but set back into the handle for deeper hollowing when the 1-1/16 inch (as measured, it is advertised as 1-1/8) shaft of the handle can be used to gain greater rigidity when the cutting tip needs to be extended far over the tool rest. This is made possible because the shaft of the handle is covered with a soft foam gripping sleeve for only the last 8-1/2 inches of the shaft, the remaining 11 inches of shaft are left uncovered for unhindered movement over a tool rest or in a tool gate. The tool is actually 21 inches in overall length because a 5/8 inch coupling rod is inserted in the end to allow stacking of two or even three handles linearly. The presence of the coupler makes it easy to extend the length of this tool to 32 inches by addition of the short Proforme handle, almost 40 inches by addition of a second Promaster handle, or even more if it is combined with the no longer advertised 24 or 36 inch Woodcut handles. Such configurations would make possible quite deep hollowing, commensurate with the thick shafts. This is a great handle design, both as it performs as an independent tool, and because of the great versatility it offers by being so easily combined with other similar handles.

Woodcut Promaster 24 inch

long handle: [Discontinued by Woodcut, but at the time of this writing some stock remained at Craft Supplies] This handle, though very similar to the Promaster 20 inch Double Ended, differs in that it lacks the integral coupling extension and is a few inches longer, bringing it up to a 24

inch length. I like having those extra inches, but the loss of the coupling definitely reduces its versatility compared to its newer cousin. Again, it uses two set screws to secure tools, the shaft of the handle is covered with a soft foam gripping sleeve, and the remaining shaft length of 16 inches is left uncovered for use over a tool rest or in a tool gate. This tool uses the same plastic end cap found on my short and very long Woodcut handles. This made it easy to add lead shot for greater vibration damping and counterbalancing stability. After being filled with lead, this has become one of my favorite medium length handles.

Woodcut Long Handle:

This 36-1/2 inch long handle offers 24-1/2 inches of exposed shaft, with the last 8 inches covered by a soft, open cell foam sleeve gripping surface (giving the gripping area an approximately 1-1/2 inch diameter). The exposed shaft has an approximately 1-1/16 outside diameter with an interior bore necked down with a sleeve to take 5/8 inch tool shafts. A single set screw penetrates the sidewall at the front end of the shaft for securing tools. The handle comes supplied with an internal plug and end cap to create a chamber ready to accept lead birdshot. I find the lead weighted handle to have excellent balance and damping and to be superior to the similar Hutson handles that only have a shallow socket to take the tool shafts. Alas, Woodcut no longer lists this (nor the 24 inch) shaft as available, instead encouraging turners to purchase two of their 20 inch Promaster handles (at a considerably greater price, I would add) and couple them together. Perhaps if enough interest were to appear, Ken will relent and return this excellent and relatively inexpensive handle to production.

Hutson Handles:

[Until recently, available from Craft Supplies] Available in two lengths: 36 and 48 inches overall. The shafts are made from stainless steel and are lead filled. Like the Woodcut handles, the grip material is only at the distal end of the shaft, allowing the majority of the shaft length to be placed directly on the tool rest when long overhangs are called for. The shaft of the working tool fits into a shallow socket (of 5/8 inch bore) in the front end of the shaft and is held by two inline set screws. My only complaint with these shafts is the socket, as it prevents seating tool shafts deeply inside the larger bore handle.

Exocet Super Long Handle:

[Available from Jacques Coulombe] Just slightly shorter (at 33-1/4) than the Woodcut long handle, but with a hand tightened camlock instead of set screws. This tool has the advantages that you do

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not need to keep Allen wrenches close by and the camlock will not munge up your shafts like set screws can, but it is possible to score shafts by twisting them in the handle while the cam remains tightened. The camlock will only receive 5/8 inch tool shafts (the actual interior bore of the handle is larger). Lots of hard rubber, lightly textured, grip area (that, along with the camlock, interferes with it being used as a shaft extension). The handle also is very expensive, slightly harder to fill with lead shot, and not as amenable for use as an extended shaft as well as handle.

Munro Handle: [Available from Lee Valley] This handle is somewhat of a departure from the typical metal handle. The handle itself is of a good length (19.5 inch) and diameter (approximately 1.25 inches), but Munro has deliberately designed it to be very light in weight. This runs counter to tradition, where deep hollowing tools have had heavy as well as long shanks to help counterbalance the fulcrum forces from long extensions over the tool rest. It also does little to nothing to help absorb the shocks and low to medium frequency vibrations so common to deep hollowing, though the handle's EVA outer covering will help block low intensity high frequency vibrations from reaching your hands. The handle is bored for the 5/8 inch size for only a short distance before opening up to a much larger bore for the extent of the handle. An aluminum plug is fitted to the far end. I drove out the plug, fitted an internal plug as deep inward as the shaft might maximally be located in use, and then filled the back end with lead bird shot prior to replacing the plug. The shaft now has some additional vibration absorption, but the weight is still far less than most handles. Munro has taken a somewhat different approach to tightening the shaft in place, using a large phenolic plastic ball on the end of a bolt, rather than the usual set screw that requires a wrench. This appears to be an effective means to avoid having to chase around for an Allen wrench, but there will likely be some debate as to whether having this big round knob project from the side of the handle is a positive or a negative. I have tended to find it to be a positive, allowing a reference point and another small hand hold. I haven't found the knob to interfere in any way. The clear downside is that it offers only a single fixing screw, as opposed to the double set screws found on most metal handles. Overall, I really like the easy extension adjustment and shaft interchange made possible by the ball knob, and I like the tactile feel of the EVA sleeve, but wish for a heavier handle. [See my full review of the Munro hollowing tool and handle at <http://www.fholder.com/Woodturning/lyn.html>]

Vermec Handle and Shaft Extension: [Available from Carroll's Woodcraft Supplies] This handle is unique (at least to my knowledge) in

having a 12 mm bore. This matches the tang of the many Vermec hollowing tool shafts (see earlier sections on cutting and scraping hollowers for their description) as well as the size of tang that is common on many of the P&N gouges. 12 mm is slightly less than 1/2 inch, and while a 12 mm tang can be mounted in a 1/2 inch bore handle, it is a sloppy fit. Thus, this handle is a very welcome addition not only for use with the Vermec shafts, but for many of the P&N gouges one might have or consider obtaining. The handle itself is 14 inches in length, having a 1 diameter inch stainless steel shaft covered for the last 9.75 inches with a thick dense foam rubber sleeve that brings the gripping diameter up to 1.4 inches. The sleeve has been durable, offers a comfortable grip, and isolates high frequency vibration. The handle comes loaded with lead shot, that further assists with shock absorption and vibration, and provides what I found to be an excellent balance. The end cap is easily removable, so you can add a small amount of additional shot (which I did) or remove shot to tune the weight and balance to your personal preference. The handle secures the tool shafts with a single set screw, which is more than adequate to lock the Vermec hollowing shafts in place, as these tools come with a small flat ground into them that will ensure there is no accidental rotation. The handle length is a good match for gouge holding and when working on smaller hollow forms. When extra length is desirable, be it for leverage or reach, an approximately 8 inch stainless steel extension shaft can be fitted between the handle and the tool shaft. A side handle is also available as an accessory. Though this handle system is limited to tools with a 12 mm shaft or tang, it otherwise offers a lot of versatility. I use it regularly, both as a gouge handle and for hollowing.

John Jordan handles. [Available direct from John Jordan via his website] A more recent offering in handles, these come in three sizes. I only have his medium sized handle, which is 18 inches long. John makes two others, one is 12 inches and the other is 24 inches. Their textured, slightly cushioned, rubber-like grip is colored red, blue or black, respective to the 18 inch, 12 inch and 24 inch lengths. If you really would like another length, John is likely to be able to accommodate you by special order, as I believe he makes these up in his own shop. At 1-3/16, the handle is ever so slightly narrower in diameter than the typical steel handle, and in my medium sized hands the smaller diameter feels very comfortable for gouge work, but not as good for the twisting forces sometimes encountered when hollowing. The handles are bored 1/2 inch at one end and 5/8 inch at the other. Shafts are held in place by two, inline, set screws.

Oneway handles: [Available from a wide range of woodworking suppliers] Two lengths, 12 and 17-3/4 inch

long, both 1-5/16 inches in OD. Lightly textured, plastic covered steel handles with 1/2 inch bore at one end and 5/8 inch at the other. 3/8 and 3/4 inch adaptors are available, the latter provides a socketed extension to the basic handle that will also fit most other 5/8 inch bore handles. Bore holes are slightly oversized and accommodate the Kelton Hollowing tools better than others because of this. Two, inline set screws are at each end. Heavier for their size than most, such as the Hamlets, the unweighted Woodcut or Jordan. I don't like the slick plastic covering quite as well as the rubber on the Hamlets, the ribbed surface of the Keltons, or the textured surface of the Jordans. With a short section of 1/2 inch or 5/8 inch rod (as appropriate for the tool size inserted), the two handles can be joined to make an almost 30 inch handle (or more with additional handles of the same size). A good highly adaptable handle system.

Kelton Standard Handles: [Available from a wide range of Kelton Suppliers] Three sizes; approximately 11-3/4, 12 and 24 inches long, (the latter composed of a 17 inch hollow and removable 7 inch solid section). Some suppliers, like Lee Valley, also offer inexpensive stepped steel rods to join two or more handles together for additional length. Shaft diameter increases with shaft length, from 1 inch on the mini handle to 1.5 inch on the longest. The steel handles are covered with a spiral ribbed plastic that allows a solid, but comfortable grip. I like the ribbed plastic surface slightly better than the smooth

plastic of the Oneway. These are good handles at a reasonable price. Much like the Oneway handles, these come with sockets of different size at each end. The longest has 3/4 and 5/8 inch bores, the small has 5/8 and 1/2, and the mini has 3/8 and 5/16. Shafts are held in place by two inline set screws. The mini is outstanding for use with small scale hollowing tools and will work well with most 1/4 inch shafts as well as the 5/16 inch Kelton Hollowers.

Kelton Ultimate Handle: [Available from Craft Supplies] This handle differs from the others by having a removable collar which tightens a standard internal collet to hold the tool shaft. The collets are standard ER-32 type (the same as Beall uses for his collet chuck). The handle comes with a collet to hold a 3/4 inch shaft. Collets for smaller shaft sizes may be substituted, but Kelton recommends using adaptor sleeves that bring the shaft size up to the 3/4 size of the supplied collet. Kelton makes several sizes of sleeves and offers them individually for a modest price. The advantage of using the adaptor sleeves is that they may be left mounted to the individual tool shaft, and allows for quicker interchangeability of shafts in the handle, as all will be of the same outside diameter. If you are regularly working with tools of only a single size (say the common 5/8 inch shaft size), then a 5/8 inch collet could be inserted in the handle and the adaptor collars would not then be needed for that size. The collar is of sufficient size that hand gripping

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alone is almost always adequate for tightening and release of the collet, but it does have two flats should a wrench ever be required. The 22 inch handle comes in two sections, a 16-1/2 inch main section which is hollow, and a screw in, shorter almost 6 inch section which is solid steel, and thus heavier. While I find the front collar assembly too bulky for gouge use where one is likely to be traversing the tool along a tool rest, I find it quite acceptable for hollowing use where the tool may be angled and adjusted for extension, but otherwise little movement along the toolrest occurs. The large size of the grip, the overall length, and the rear weighting when the extension is added, makes for a very serviceable handle for hollowing. The handle could be additionally extended with another section, for deep hollowing, and I would welcome a longer, heavier extension available as an option. Those who like to free hand hollow, but prefer not to use an armbrace, will find this a very appealing handle, particularly for deeper and larger hollow forms. It allows for quick changes of hollowing shafts, without having to mess with finding Allen wrenches and tightening set screws. Those experienced with hollowing know just how often one can change between different models and curvatures of hollowing tools, and will appreciate how this handle makes such interchanges quick and easy.

Serious Lathe Ultimate Cam Lock Handle System: [Available direct from the Serious Lathe web site] This has been around for a while, but has received limited exposure as it is only available direct from Serious Lathe. It is a modular design with a 16-1/2 inch cam lock handle, and an optional 15 inch handle extension. The handles are hollow and come with an end cap that will allow you to fill them with lead shot to adjust the weight and balance of the handle to your personal taste. Both the handle and extension are covered with an open cell foam to further deal with vibration and shock. The main section uses a collet system much like the Kelton and has all the same advantages. The handles can be purchased configured for either 5/8 or 3/4 inch tools. Particularly nice are individual adapter collets that have either 5/8 or 3/4 inch outside diameters and 1/4, 5/16, 3/8, 1/2 and 5/8 inch bores. I have not used this handle system, but I have read nothing but favorable comments from those who do.

Stewart/Sorby Armbrace: [Available from Craft Supplies (both), The Cutting Edge (Sorby) and Packard Woodworks (both)] I can't imagine do-

ing larger forms without an armbrace. These have a 3/4 interior socket with single T handled bolt (that can work loose). Their short receiving socket (about 1.25 inches deep) does not allow for variations in tool shaft extension. I find both comfortable to use and far less punishing to my body than most traditional straight shafts. They also provide much greater functional stability to the tool shaft. I regularly use the Woodcut Proforme tools in them with an sleeve adapter to bring the shaft diameter up to the required 3/4 inch size to fit in the sockets. They offer very good resistance to torsional forces, and allow you to absorb the forces of heavy cuts such as can be achieved with the cutting tools. The Sorby 2000 version is essentially the same as the more familiar Stewart, but the Sorby's hard rubber ribbed handle is not nearly as comfortable and its armrest uses semi flexible aluminum rather than solid shaped steel. The aluminum might be of some advantage to those with very large or small arms in that you could shape the armrest to your arm, and more comfortable foam grips can be substituted for the hard rubber.

Don Pencil Scorpion Armbrace: [Available from Lee Valley and direct from the Pencil web site] While the Sorby and Stewart armbraces are dimensionally the same, the new Scorpion can be configured to be similar or a bit different because the pistol section of the handle is removable from the armbrace portion. This means one can choose between two forearm lengths (6.75 and 8.75), interchange between them, and even remove the forearm section to achieve a 10 inch overall length pistol grip. This offers some much appreciated versatility over the other two. I find the shorter shank works well for me and allows a slightly better fit than either the Sorby or the Stewart. The Scorpion comes with what I find to be the nicest of the three stock grips. It is of about the same density as the Stewart, but is of a larger diameter. I also find the Scorpion to have the most comfortable arm cup. The Stewart cup is of smaller radius and is of hard metal. The Sorby cup is of a softer metal (probably aluminum) and can be formed into a larger or smaller radius. The Scorpion, has a large radius steel arm cup, but one which can be closed down in vise if a smaller cup is desired. Finally, the Scorpion System offers an optional set of four reducer sleeves that allow the armbrace to be used with shafts of 3/8, 7/16, 1/2 and 5/8 as well as the primary bore of 3/4. (See my full length review of the Scorpion System at <http://www.fholder.com/Woodturning/lyn.html>)

Sorby Pistol Grip: [Available at The Cutting Edge and from Britain at The ToolPost] This is a pistol grip style handle made of 3/4 inch rod that has welded to its forward end a socket to take 3/4 inch shafts (the Stewart version is only bored to a 3/8 inch diameter). It is 12-3/4 inches in overall length, the latter section fitted with a ridged, hard rubber handle. I find the handle most uncomfortable and replaced mine with a Suffoam grip available from Reid Tool Supply. To assist with torsional forces, Sorby offers an optional side handle to be used with the Pistol Grip Handle.

Sorby Side Handle: [Available from Cutting Edge Tools and from Britain at The ToolPost] Sorby offers a side handle (approximately 5-1/2 inches) that can be fitted to any 3/4 inch shaft. It, like the other Sorby RS2000 offerings, has the uncomfortable deeply ridged hard rubber grip. I have had this handle for several years, but find I never use it.

Hamlet: [availability uncertain] Hamlet's website shows a HCT 613 Side Handle "designed for supporting the multi-handle when deep hollowing or heavy bowl turning." It appears to be the same size and use the same rubber covering as their steel handles. I have yet to see anyone offering this side handle, and given my experience with the Sorby version, am rather skeptical of its value.

Stewart Omni Pistol: [Available from Craft Supplies and Packard Woodworks] Part of the Stewart System. Made of 3/4 inch diameter rod, it has a 3/8 bore on the end, just like the Stewart Omnitool. This allows it to take the same range of tips, including tool bits and scrapers, as its longer brother. It is 14-1/2 inches long, and is fitted with sculpted hard foam rubber grip.

Stewart Straight Handle: [Available from Craft Supplies and Packard Woodworks] The Stewart Straight Handle is identical to the Omni Pistol, except for remaining straight over its entire 12 inch length. Both the Omni Pistol and Straight Shaft are useful to hold many small scale hollowing tools, including Stewart's own 3/8 inch diameter mini hollowing shafts.

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