

Phil Reardon



Woodturner Toymaker

An occasional series featuring projects from Phil Reardon's forthcoming book, 'Woodturner Toymaker', to be published by Stobart Davies Ltd

Phil who taught us all we know about making clever toys, turns turtle with this lively little fellow who so far has managed to escape the soup bowl

TURNING TURTLE

A word in your shell-like. I'm not sure if this cove is a turtle or a tortoise; I'm not certain there is that much difference. I looked them up in a book from my boyhood, (an illustrated dictionary for young people.) The tortoise entry read "a kind of turtle", the turtle entry "much prized for making soup". Pondering the finer points of zoological classification won't benefit readers of this tome anyway.

I like turtles, so stoically self-contained, so patently prehistoric. I wanted to make a toy which involved a wizened physog poking from (and retreating into) a substantial shell. The tail was an afterthought. Well it would be, wouldn't it!

I pondered the proposition for a long time before getting around to making one. My initial plan (heavily inspired by a tin toy in my possession) was basically to turn a bowl, invert it and add a mechanism to move the head and feet.

In the event, as so often happens, it was the available material that dictated the approach. I'd been given some glorious reclaimed pitch pine. It was at the end of a remarkable chain. The stuff came out of a demolition job on an old Yorkshire mill and was ripped down in lengths of 115mm (4 1/2 in.) square.

It found its way to a manufacturer of four-poster beds — he was busy making antiques from it; I copped the scrag ends — short pieces surplus to requirement. Lovely, golden, highly resinous and handsomely marked, it seemed appropriate (don't ask me why) that a wood that at one time was used in the commercial production of turpentine should end up as turtle stock.

The spilt lingers

Certainly the age of the timber was in line with the reputed longevity of the turtle. Eventually after some thought it became a 'between centres' job. I reckoned the figuring on a rounded form would be sufficiently decorative without further embellishment.

My original plan, when still thinking along 'turned over bowl' lines, had been to use a plain timber then groove the segment joints on the lathe and divide them radially, making the incisions by hand.

Down to business

An egg shape (albeit a bit blunted one) is turned first. Pitch pine's resinous exudations

demand keen tools and frequent sharpening. This wood doesn't take too kindly to abrasive papers. Once off the lathe, about one third of the 'egg' is sliced off and the underside of the workpiece faced on the belt sander (which quickly clogs, so it is best to use a belt that is on its way out rather than a brand new one).

Shock horror! cries of protest, what a wasteful way of working — a whole third discarded! I beg to differ. Even though it was buckshee, this portion won't be used to light the workshop stove, nothing terminal for goodness' sake.

We are in the reincarnation business, it is bound to resurface in some future concoction. I did consider slicing the thing in half and attempting twins, but there really wasn't enough room for the undercarriage and the overall effect would have been a spot squat anyhow.

Digging in

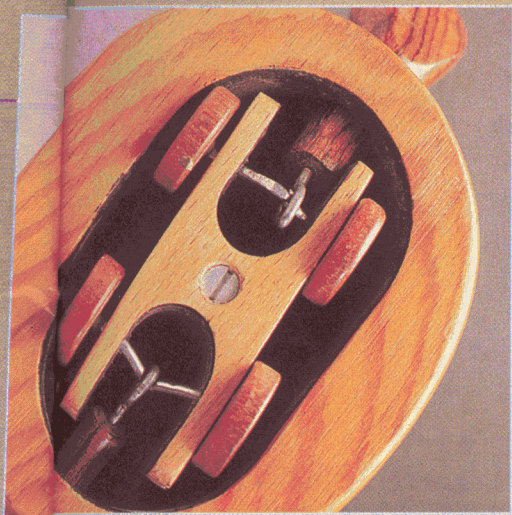
First I used a drill, made a couple of entries and then tidied the aperture with a chisel. Holes were drilled through the wall front and rear to accommodate the free moving head and tail. These extremities are turned between centres. I used

There beyond the bay of Gurtle
Lay a large and lively turtle;
"You're the Cove", he said "for me" and I.

Edward Lear

Although he never stirs from home
the tortoise like a load of furniture jolts down the path

Basho



Mexican rosewood because of its colour and markings — greeny-brown with black lines. The bottom of the head is flattened on the belt sander. The undercarriage is made from a 25mm (1in.) square block of beech 70mm (23/4in.) long. A 15mm (5/8in.) drill is used to form the neat curves at the ends of the slots and the waste removed by sawing up to the holes from each end. A sharp chisel and abrasive wrapped around an old dowel is used for the finishing. Small holes are drilled all the way through the sides to locate the axles and then the block is sawn through (the cut runs through the centre of these two holes) so that a section about 6mm (1/4in.) is removed. Now for the metalwork. Shrug on the protective clothing, out with the oxyacetylene tackle, joking, just joking — but for years I've been a strongly prejudiced purist. You could run a metal detector over most of the

toys I have ever made and it wouldn't register a flicker.

The fact is, I'm veering in the opposite direction currently and getting involved in mixed-media productions. Truth to tell, there just wasn't room to use anything but metal parts. I made the axles from a piece welding rod which, although it was the right diameter, was tough and hard to shape. After shillyshallying around, applying the pliers, I realised that coat hanger wire would have done just as well and is much more malleable.

The head and tail

These are linked to the axles by modified (slightly squashed) screw-in eyelets, the kind you buy for curtain wires. The wheels are 22mm (7/8in.) in diameter and 6mm (1/4in.) thick. Spin a scrap of hardwood to size and part them off one by one. Mark the centres with a brad point while the work is revolving, it's easier and much more accurate than trying to locate them later. They are drilled with blind holes to accept the cranked axles, and the head and tail links are slipped over the axles before the wheels are attached with epoxy resin adhesive. The whole undercarriage assembly is held together and attached to the shell with a woodscrew. If, like me, you find the exposed head of this centre screw offensive then cover it. It would have been nice to have counter-sunk and plugged the hole with a pellet produced by a plug cutter, but the bottom 'plate' is only 6mm (1/4in.) thick. So, rather than risk building in an unnecessary weakness, I settled for capping it with a very thin turned button. Don't glue it into position until a dry run has convinced you that everything about this hard-backed novel number is hunky dory.

