

TURNING TOPS

Have fun and help a needy charity

BOB ROSAND

On one of my visits to the Western New York Woodturners, I received a couple of bags of rainbow-colored wood from a chapter member. The pieces were about 4-in. long and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ -in. diameter. He told me the pieces were cut offs from a yo-yo factory. They were too short to be of use to the yo-yo factory, but ideal for a woodturner making weed pots, ring holders and spinning tops.

Tops are an especially good project right now. They are always fun to make, but this year we are asking everyone attending the AAW annual symposium in Providence, Rhode Island in June to make and donate tops to a local charity. At Thursday night's "Learn-To-Turn" session, board members will also be available to help you make a few tops and other projects. For more details, see Page 6

You can see color photos of some of my tops, and some tops made by Dick Montague of the Woodchuck Turners of Northern, VT, on Page 33.

To get you started making tops, I'd like to describe how I made the simple spinning tops shown in the color photos. My tops are made from some of those odd pieces of colored wood.

You can also make tops from any other hardwood you might have around. You'd be surprised at how many attractive tops can be made from even small scraps. I save all my odds and ends from other jobs and on those days that I feel a bit obsessive/compulsive, I glue these scraps up into larger usable pieces. I cut these laminated chunks into pieces $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-square by about 4-in.-long.

This size block gives me enough material to make the handle used to spin the top, as well as the pointed section on which it spins. The only other part is the disk, which provides the centrifugal force to keep the top spinning.

Making the top

I made the disk for each of the tops shown in the photos from old yo-yo bodies. I sliced them into pieces about $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. thick.

Safety warning

A word of caution is needed here. Be very careful if you cut the circular slices on a bandsaw. Since the pieces are round, they can catch and ruin your whole day. Check the manual that came with your bandsaw or other source for information on how safely to cut round stock on a bandsaw. Lately I've begun to glue the slices to larger waste blocks, so that I can cut them safely on the table saw or the chop miter saw.

Once you have the segments cut, mark the center and use the drill press to bore a $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. diameter hole through the center of the disk. Here again, you might consider a jig to hold the piece while drilling. I've cut my fingers a few times when the piece caught and started spinning while I was boring out the center hole.

Turning the spinning stem

Next take the $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4-in. piece of colored wood you previously prepared and chuck it between centers on your lathe.

Turn one end, the end toward the tailstock, to a cylinder that just fits the $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. diameter center hole in the disk and extends about $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. through it. I



Top Kit: Making tops doesn't require much: a lathe, a wooden disc (you'll find likely candidates in your scrap pile), and a rectangular block. The rest is up to you. Have fun as you shape the disk, the handle and the point on which the unit spins.



epoxy these pieces together using gap filling epoxy just in case the fit is not perfect. So far I've had no failures.

Once the epoxy joining the disk and stem dries, we're ready to turn. Place the top in a spigot chuck and bring up the tailstock and lock it in place. This centers the top and provides support. (You could turn these tops between centers, but I find it easier to support one end with the jaws of my spigot chuck. It also allows me to use the long point of my skew to get a sharp point for the top to run on.)

Using a roughing out gouge turn the disk perfectly round, then use a



After turning the rectangular blank to a cone shape, above left, the author epoxies it into a hole bored in the disk and begins to refine the shape of the top. The stem protrudes only a half-inch below the disk. Photos by the author.



Rosand shapes a small bulbous end on the top of the stem, above left, then refines the shape of the point.



The final shape of the point on which the top spins is done after the tail stock is removed, above left. Then a skew is used to refine the top and part the piece from the lathe.

$\frac{3}{8}$ -in. spindle gouge to refine the shape.

I leave about $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. of material at what will be the point of the top and then turn the handle. At this point, I carefully sand and then use a skew with its long point down, to make a sharp point for the top to run on.

Next, I remove the tailstock. Again, using the long point of the skew down, I cut the top from the lathe, clean up whatever imperfections might remain, and finish. Any good clear finish will do: use your favorite.

That's about it, except that I should say again that you don't need colored

wood to make tops like these. Any good hardwood will do.

Bob Rosand is a turner and teacher in Bloomsburg, PA, and on the AAW Board of Directors. He will be turning tops at the Providence, RI symposium.