

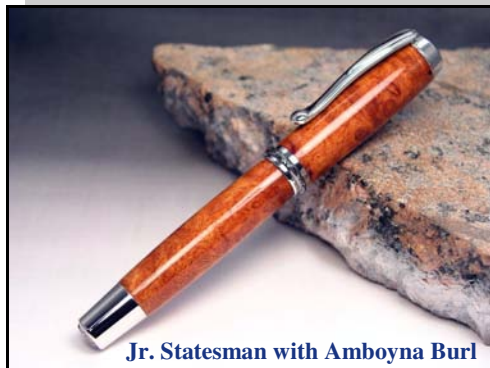
“Behind the Lathe”

by Johnathan Burton

James Mann



Officer Mann enjoying a close-up look at a motorcycle built by Big Bear Choppers for the California Highway Patrol



Jr. Statesman with Amboy Burl

While most of us are sleeping soundly in bed, James Mann is just getting home from a hard day's work as a California Peace officer for the Highway Patrol. After arriving at home, it's only a matter of time before he's tinkering away in his shop. "Most of the time, I get off work around 11:00 pm. I come home and try to get some of the quiet work out of the way (sanding, finishing, etc.) I then will spend about five to ten hours on the weekend if I can spare it."

Balancing time is what this native Californian is good at. With work, family, and many other interests competing for his time, James always manages to squeeze a little time into his busy schedule for his pens, while continuing to balance his priorities.

"I'm pretty much an open book, to those that know me. I will say, though, that not a lot of people know me."

As a child, with two older sisters, James enjoyed spending time one-on-one with his father in the shop. “My father is an avid woodworker, genius of all things,” he said. “Woodworking, electrical, metal fabrication, welding, painting, everything.”

With such a great teacher, James quickly became familiar with each of the tools in the shop, various techniques of the trade, and above all, shop safety. At age 12, he took his first “shop” class in junior high, and made his first pen in high school.

Now, most of us know James for his detailed finishing techniques and his work with CA glue. As a young boy, James learned the hard way of the power that CA glue can have.

Out in the shop, as usual, James was putting the finishing touches on his third version of a blow gun. With finishing nails, paper, and CA glue, it was the beginning recipe for disaster.

“Unfortunately, I forgot to let the CA dry on the last dart, which of course was the first dart I loaded for the initial test. I took a deep breath, and blew as hard as I could.” Having coated both of his upper and lower lips



James' home workshop, loaded with all of the tools he needs to create his beautiful works of art.



James' “stash” cabinet of pen supplies.

with CA, they bonded instantly. With a stuffy nose, James could barely breathe. His parents weren't home at the time, and an older sister came to the rescue. Pinning the panicked James to the ground, his sister poured nail-polish remover on his face until he could rip them apart. “My lips were chapped for about two months!” he said.

Despite James' natural curiosities, and obvious fascination with building things, he, like most kids, managed to survive. He graduated high school and is an alumni of California State University of Sacramento.

“I tend to like clean lines without all sorts of beads and odd shapes. Simple and elegant.”



The Family

Left: James and Melissa
Bottom: Skyler and Braden



James is a family man. Married for nine years to his wife Melissa, and the father of two, Skyler and Braden, he enjoys spending time with them and playing with the kids. Speaking about his wife, James commented that “she is very supportive. She is my best critic and always encourages me.”

James has also used his “shop” knowledge to supply the family with handmade gifts and his children with beautiful furniture. He even made his daughter a bed from scratch.

Even though life is hectic, James tries to find time to unwind when he can. “I love music. I play the guitar, drums and electric bass”. He also enjoys recording music in his home studio, cooking, and riding his motorcycle.

With such little time to devote to penmaking, James has spent his time sharpening and honing his skills. “I have ruined many pens with my exploration of how to get it right.”

James is not unlike most penturners when asked what the easiest aspect of penmaking is. His response, like most, is “buying supplies.” James also added that giving a nice gift is also easy and something he is very proud of.

“For each member of our department who works in my office, that retires, I make a 300 Winchester magnum casing pen with their name and badge number engraved on it. I am very proud to give those pens as retirement gifts. That is one of the things I get the most joy out of. I also keep it pretty low key, so that really the only people that know about it are the recipients. That way the next to retiree gets the same surprise.”

What does the future hold for James? He commented that perhaps after retirement he will focus a little more on penmaking. “Right now, for the amount of time I have, I am happy. I like to leave free time to experiment with new techniques and innovations.” James would also like to experiment more with creating his own castings.

Whatever the future holds, it is clear that James will continue to better the art of penmaking with his creations. “My goal is just to make nice writing instruments that people recognize as being high quality.”

“My wife Melissa is very supportive. She is my best critic and always encourages me.”

Questions and Answers

Q: What thoughts would you like to share with other penturners?

A: Keep an open mind and explore things that you think (maybe even know) might not work. Most importantly, if you are a novice turner, remember that you have something to offer even the most advanced of turners. I go through life knowing that if you don't at least listen to the new guy, that you will often miss out on the latest techniques. Skilled craftsmen might not always be innovators. Newbies often are, sometimes by mistake!

Q: What is your favorite type of pen to write with?

A: I would have to say a rollerball. I used to have decent cursive handwriting but my job ruined that - printing in capitals all of the time. It has caused me to forget how to write properly. A real shame in my mind. I would love to be able to enjoy a nice fountain pen.

Q: What have you learned or received as a member of the International Association of Penturners?

A: Sometimes learning comes in the form of inspiration. I enjoy seeing many of the new innovative ideas that arise out of conversation and testing. Often these ideas trigger other ideas that lead to new techniques, or sometimes I just use those offered by others.

Q: Do you have anyone you'd like to mention as a mentor or positive influence?

A: My father, whether he knows it or not. Also, anyone who has taken the time to try something new, and offer up their work for others to critique.



*For more information about
James Mann's work, please
visit his website at
www.mannmadecreations.com*

Top: This amazing desk set features beautiful Red Mallee burl from Australia.

Right: A close-up of the terrific finish James achieved on this masterpiece.

