

PENTURNER'S CORNER

By Scott Greaves

PENCILS

Most people who turn pens will also turn pencils at some time. Quite often it will be because a customer requests a pen-and-pencil set. Occasionally some people just prefer to use a pencil. Over the years I have generally found that I make about fifty pens for each pencil, and I had gotten to the point where I wouldn't even make a pencil unless it was by request. But recently the selection of pencil kits has gotten more interesting, and I have been getting more requests for them, so this article will be about making pencils.

There are a couple of different kinds of pencil mechanisms on the market. One of the most popular is a push mechanism, meaning there is a button on the finial end of the pen that you push to extend the lead. This is the mechanism used on the common slimline pencil kit that matches the slimline pen, as well as the power pencil from Penn State (www.pennstateind.com). These make for small, lightweight pencils that are fairly reliable.

Another common mechanism is a twist mechanism that extends the lead. These kinds of mechanisms are generally used in pencils that match the American, European and Cigar style pens. Reviewing the offerings from the various manufacturers reveals that most of the popular styles of pens also have pencil kits to match.

Another interesting style of pencil is the Perfect Fit Convertible kit by Berea (www.bereahardwoods.com). This is actually a pen kit that is not only designed to use the popular Parker refill, but it is also designed to take a pencil mechanism made by Schmidt. Because it can be used as either a pen or a pencil, it is called a "convertible" pen.

A recent entry into the pencil kit market are the Sketchers and carpenter pencils. These pencils are designed around a large heavy lead that is useful for marking and drawing. The mechanism is a kind of push style collet, similar to popular drafting pencils. To use it you push the button on the back, and it opens the collet enough to allow the lead to be adjusted to the desired length.

Both Berea and Craft Supplies (www.woodturnerscatalog.com) also offer a combination pen and pencil kit. This kind of kit contains both a pen and a pencil, which can be selected by a mechanism on the finial end.

One last style of pencil I want to mention really isn't a kit available from penturning suppliers. The popular Pentel pencil available from office supply stores can be dismantled, and a new barrel can be turned from wood or whatever material of choice. The tricky part is drilling the long, stepped hole needed to fit the mechanism. Craft Supplies used to sell a special stepped bit just for this purpose, but I understand they stopped stocking it.

When making pencils one consideration you will need to face is which size lead will best suit the purpose intended. Most of the normal pencil kits available use the common .7mm lead. Refills for this size lead are widely available in many department stores. I

find the .7mm lead to be on the thin side. I have trouble with lead this thin because I must have a heavy hand, and I break the lead often. People who use pencils often will probably have no problem with this lead.

Common lead sizes are .5mm, .7mm, and a few .9mm. I like making the pencils from the Pentel mechanism as I noted above because it is about the only way to use .9mm. The Power pencil from Penn State uses a 2mm lead, and I am told leads of this size are available at Office Depot. The new Sketcher style of pencils mentioned above use an extra heavy 5.6mm lead. I thought this size lead might be hard to find replacements for, but it has been used for years in artist pencils, and can be found at craft and art stores in a number of different colors and hardness's.

I have recently found a good market for my turned pencils with some of the auditors and accountants where I work. Not only do they appreciate a good pencil, but they also appreciate something that is beautiful and useful as well. If you have been avoiding pencils, be adventuresome and try some of the new styles. I think you'll find a ready clientele for these elegant writing utensils!

This article originally appeared in the March 2006 issue of More Woodturning. Please visit <http://www.fholder.com/Woodturning/woodturn.htm> for subscription details. Scott.



Sketcher Pencils by Scott Greaves

The following photos were included with the article
as originally published in *More Woodturning*



European Pencil by Gerry Rhoades



Perfect Fit Pencil by Gerry Rhoades