

The Journey from *Penturning to Penmaking*

by Kurt Hertzog

Improving Through Competition

As you progress on your journey from penturning to penmaking, how will you know how far you have come and what you should work on to improve? Since we've already established that there is no end point, you will continue to refine all the aspects from construction to aesthetics. Granted, as you progress, improvements will be smaller and actually will be refinements. So where will you get guidance on what is the next most important part to be worked on? My suggestion is to seek input from your peers through critique or competition (or both). I would caution you not to follow this path if you are thin-skinned or are not genuinely interested in feedback. Nothing will be more disheartening than hearing that your pride-and-joy ability to finish your pen needs improvement. For this issue, we will focus on competitions, and a future issue will deal with critiques.

WHY ENTER?

I believe there are only two reasons that people enter competitions. They enjoy the accolades, ribbons, trophies, and bragging rights—somewhat of a peacock syndrome. You all probably know people who still have a room filled with their high school football trophies or their childhood beauty pageant ribbons. I believe another—and a much better reason to enter a competition—is to see how you stack up against others in your arena. A competition among your peers still may yield prizes and bragging rights, but I believe it brings out the desire to excel. If you are going to compete against your fellow penmakers, aren't you going to do the very best that you can? Aren't you going to reach a bit further than in the past to make sure you put on the best showing that you possibly can?

Though competitions can be a valuable learning and feedback experience, there is one huge thing to remember—placing well or winning only says that you are better than those you competed against. As they say, you don't need to be able to outrun the bear chasing you in the woods; you only need to run a little bit faster than the slowest person there. By all means, put your work into competitions and see how you stack up. As you progress, get into stiffer competitions. You can learn an amazing amount if you pay attention. The big caveat in any competition is who is judging and how well qualified they are for that particular task. A bowl turner of international renown may be a poor choice to judge a pen competi-



There was quite a bit of variety in the contestants' entries, and here are some of the different ends of the spectrum.



The judges only had a reference number that put the pen into the proper category; the makers were ID cross-referenced at the end.

tion. Likewise, even an accomplished wood penturner may be inappropriate to effectively judge a cast pen



The Casting Category winners were (first to fourth from front to back) John Underhill, Eric Beuker, Marla Mills, and David N. Miller.



The Casting Category winners' pens are shown closed.

competition. Certainly they would be able to evaluate fit and finish, but what about the intricacies, relative difficulties, and accomplishments of the various casting techniques compared to one another?

RECENT COMPETITION

As a perfect fit to this column, I'd like to feature a recent competition that was held by one of the Internet penturning forums. For those who aren't aware, the International Association of Penturners (IAP) is an online penturning community (located at www.penturners.org) that also has physical gatherings at various locations around the country. They have been in existence for years and have grown to be one of the largest, if not the largest, groups dedicated to penturning. I was asked to be part of the judging team. Before the competition, I was invited to

have input into the categories and rules. While the contest had been alluded to for years, the time from conclusion of planning to the due date for completed pens was quite short. Future events will address this by having longer preparation times.

JUDGING AND CATEGORIES

The judging team was comprised of Laura Chandler (editor of *Pen World* magazine), Joe Herrmann (editor of *Woodturning Design* magazine), and me. Though I have no titles, I have made a few pens in my day and am one of the five council members of the Pen Makers Guild. Between the three of us, I believe we covered all the waterfronts from appreciation of the art and fine writing through the craft of turning with specific focus on penmaking, including casting and fabrication.

The four categories for the "Best of the IAP" competition were: cast blank pens, segmented pens, "kitless" pens, and open-class pens. The rules were that cast blanks needed to be made by the penmaker, as were the modifications needed to qualify as kitless. Basically, the penmaker needed to have created all that was used for his or her entry other than the actual kit parts themselves. The thirty-one entries were mixed into the appropriate categories. I want to applaud all those who took part. The participants ranged from relative newcomers to the very experienced. I give special acknowledgement to the relative newcomers who took part; there is no better way to move down the path than to dive right in, knowing that the competition is going to be tough. Remember, you are only competing against the other entrants. The field of competitors and the various entered pieces change each year. I encourage all who participated, and those who didn't, to start planning for next year's event. Don't wait until the last minute to try to create your masterpiece; get started now. You certainly will find a home for this creation, and the next, and the next, as you continue to prepare for the event.

JUDGING CRITERIA

The evaluation criteria and category weighting were created by the judges. It was done and agreed to prior to receiving any of the pens. Included in the judging criteria were writing/tactile qualities (including balance and feel in the hand), appearance, craftsmanship, difficulty, and uniqueness. The entire lot of pens was shipped from one judge to the next, until each had the opportunity and time to physically examine and rate each of the entrant's work. Upon completion of the individual evaluations, a conference call allowed the judges to confer and discuss any differences between their rankings. The end result after conferencing was a unanimous consensus on the results. Again, congratulations to the winners and to all the participants.

Places awarded were based on the actual number of participants in each category. In some instances, only a winner with no other places was determined. In other categories, first through fourth was in order. From the four winners selected for each of the respective categories, a best of show was selected. The photos on these pages show the various participants and the results. All the



Only a first place was selected because of limited participation in the Segmented Category. The winner was Bruce Robbins.



Bruce's Segmented Category winner is shown closed.



The Kitless Category was designated as kitless or kit parts with significant modification. First and second place winners (from front to back) were Bruce Robbins and Justin Short.



The Kitless Category winners are shown closed.



Winners in the Open Class (front to back) were Michael Redburn (first place) and Justin Short (both second and third place).



The Open-Class winners are shown closed.



First place winners (front to back) were Mike Redburn in Open-Class Category, Bruce Robbins in Kitless Category, Bruce Robbins in Segmented Category, and John Underhill in the Casting Category.



Mike Redburn's Open-Class winner was selected as Best of Show.



Mike's pen and several others in the competition were given the honorary title of "stealers." That is, it would be the pen you'd be tempted to steal if it was left unattended for very long.



Mike's pen was not only a stunning entry, but it was also an engineering feat. The pen was convertible to be either a fountain pen or roller ball with a choice of upper barrels and clips.



Fit and finish were key points in scoring the competition. Even the threading done by the maker was scrutinized for thread quality and proper body orientation when threaded together.



Key points for an assembled pen are the alignment of the top and bottom when assembled, and the match of the top and bottom blanks.



Fit and finish are key points in any competition. There are some fits that give you some slack, but the most important fit of them all is the one you feel for the life of the pen—the nib.



Attention to detail is key in a competition. Fit, alignment, grain match, threading, and more are scrutinized. Every pen submitted had some areas where improvements could be made.



Even a winner can have some things that could be improved. The color mismatch of the crafted end caps is apparent and so is the less than optimum fit on the lower. Internal cutting had issues also.



This is an interesting and well done casting, but a close look shows some of the air that was entrained in the resin, which became permanent when it couldn't be eliminated before the resin was too viscous and solidified.



This is a well-done blank with nice attention to detail on the feather match when the pen is threaded closed. Acceptable from a visual and tactile sense, the maker's roll-off on the corner of the upper blank to ensure meeting the fitting could potentially be improved.

winning pens are shown both open and closed. How a pen looks closed is as important as how it looks open and being used, particularly when you are looking at the alignment of patterns between the top and bottom. This alignment or lack of it is a good indication of the maker's attention to detail. The closed view also gives a great indication of "balance" and pocketability. The ungainliness of a pen or the inability to put it into a shirt or inside a suit coat pocket limits its real-world usability. With the contest director's permission, I have also included some images that illustrate things that were very positive with respect to attention to detail, as well as things that might be improved upon. None of these images or comments is intended to be negative. All are intended in the spirit of continuous improvement and suggestions that all makers may wish to note in their future endeavors.

CONTEST WINNERS

"The Best of the IAP Penturning Contest" results were the following:

Winners in the Casting Category:

- First place – John Underhill for a feather casting
- Second place – Eric Beuker for a brown casting
- Third place – Marla Mills for a paper casting
- Fourth place – David Miller for a coal casting

Winner in the Segmenting Category:

- First place – Bruce Robbins

Winners in the Kitless Category:

- First place – Bruce Robbins
- Second place – Justin Short

Winners in the Open-Class Category:

- First place – Michael Redburn for a casein/silver/opal pen
- Second place – Justin Short for a dark toffee pen
- Third place – Justin Short for a cebloplast pen

And the winner for Best of Show is Michael Redburn for a casein/silver/opal pen.

Kurt Hertzog

A professional woodturner, demonstrator, and teacher, Kurt Hertzog enjoys the continuum of woodturning, from making his own turning tools to photographing his finished turnings.

Kurt is a regular feature columnist for both *Woodturning Design* and *Woodturning* magazines, one of the five Council Members of the Pen Makers Guild, and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Woodturners.

Kurt's work has been featured in the American Association of Woodturners "Rounding The Corners" Exhibit, and he has been published in *Woodturning Design*, *American Woodturner*, *Woodturning*, *Pen World*, and *Stylus* magazines. You can see his work on his website at www.kurthertzog.com.



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