

Taking the next step. One CAW member's first impressions

Yesterday I took delivery of my new lathe, the Delta 1440 Iron Bed, while probably not my dream machine, it is one I've been looking forward to for a while. I'll give my first impressions, but first to set the perspective: I've been turning for about 10-months with a variety of lathes. I used a 12"(?) Delta for a couple hours in my first bowl class, then bought a Delta Midi. I've also used an old Powermatic 11"(?) (Green) quite a bit, and a Poolewood Euro in a class for a weekend. My Midi is mounted to a Workmate with a few extra pounds of weight added. With this 'confession' you should realize that I don't have multi-years of experience or have lots of machines to compare it to.

Now to the 1440. Between the time I shut off a "Tim The Toolman" rerun - every now and then I watch some "inspirational" tv - and the time I chucked up a piece to turn was about 1.5 hours. Assembly went very smooth, the only tools needed are one wrench, but make it an adjustable or open-end. I went with a socket and found that a couple times the bolts were too close and the socket would bind, this is on adjacent sides of the angle on the legs. This seems typical of designers who don't actually use their products. Another 1/16 space would have made all the difference in the world.

Placing the bed on the legs, and the HeadStock on the bed can be done solo, but a second person would be handy. They are heavy, good! That means a few less bags of sand to buy.

The first piece I turned was a roughed out bowl that had been drying. This wasn't much of a test but I started getting used to the power switch, especially using the 'safety cap' for shutting it down. The switch is in a similar position as my Midi - over the headstock. I probably will think of getting another switch and mounting it on the right end of the lathe - and running them in series. I like the idea of having an OFF switch close by when I'm working.

Now that I was accustomed to the on/off switch I tried a second bowl, a 'chunk' of Maple. I eyeballed the center of this Maple, drove a 'drive center' into it and brought up the tailstock. I didn't want to turn something way out of balance, but definitely not a perfect round, so I thought this would be a fair test. The drive is stiff enough that it didn't find it's own bottom - could it have been in perfect balance? Well, started at slow speed I didn't feel any vibration - I guess my eyeballs are centered.

So what do I think of my purchase? Having only used it a couple hours I'm happy with it. It's lots more massive than the Midi, and I've turned plenty with that little machine - 9" bowls. The drive isn't as quiet as the Poolewood, but then what is? I wish the speed select lever was rotated about 45-degree clockwise from it's current position, it would be a bit handier. The instruction book also doesn't have any direction on how to inspect or change the drive belt, nor how to maintain the reeves drive. The tailstock has some lateral play, so did the Midi. So I'll have to see where the correct 'center' is. I haven't used the articulated arm on the banjo yet, but it looks massive enough.

The locking levers are a bit long for their position - they interfere with the banjo locking lever in one rotation, or the tool rest in the other, shorter levers would be easier to use, but also would not have the torque to tighten - hmmm how to fix them. But they're not plastic as on the Midi.

Both pieces I worked on went great. I definitely like a variable speed, the digital control of the Poolewood is my dream. The extra power and massiveness of the 1440 over the Midi made turning a dream. The turned finish on both pieces was lots better than what I've been getting (and sanding out) from the Midi. I'll agree with Tim the Toolman - More Power (and add More Weight).

The biggest 'problem' with replacing the Midi with the 1440 was: How do I put a 6' long lathe in the space used by a 2-1/2' long Workmate? The next 'problem' is where do I put my tools? - I'd drilled (Forstner bit) a shelf with 1" holes that I'd clamped to the back of the Workmate, smaller holes for the mini-tools. I guess I'll have to build something similar and mount it to the back legs of the 1440. Sheesh, life should be so complex!

p.s. For those of you who don't watch tv re-runs - Tim The Toolman - is a character in "Home Improvement" - a take off on Bob Vela(sp?) and his tool shows. Some good advice from his neighbor Wilson Wilson, and sometimes some fair tool tips.

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Mike's article first impressions' article was posted on rec.crafts.woodturning, and it may also appear in the Chesapeake Woodturners newsletter