Serious, Bowl Busting Catches

By Wally Dickerman

The occasional small catch when turning bowls is inevitable and usually causes no real harm. It's those big bowl-busting catches that are the bane of many turners. They may damage or even break a bowl, and they can result in a possible injury to the turner.

Why do the serious catches happen? There are many ways that a catch can happen, but nearly always it's because of the way the tool was being handled. A large catch is frequently a result of losing control of the tool when a small catch occurs. Any scraping tool, including hand-held hollowing tools, should, whenever possible, be used with the handle under the forearm for support. When using a scraper or a hollowing tool or a bowl gouge, the tool handle should be tucked in against your side if possible. Move your body to move the tool. This will require some good footwork to maintain your balance. The large muscles in your body will do a much better job of controlling the tool than the small muscles will. Holding the tool out away from your body is often an invitation to losing control if a catch occurs.

A few things that you should know to prevent catches....

Turn with sharp tools. Always…. Forcing a dull tool is the beginning of a catch.

Relax… White knuckle turning will work but can result in torn grain and possible catches. Don’t be too aggressive or in a big hurry. You’re having fun.

Without bevel support when using the gouge the tool will dig in. However, don’t ride the bevel too hard. Just let the tool “kiss” the wood.

Turning with tools extended too far off the rest, especially lightweight tools, can result in a catch because the tool is more difficult to control and it can vibrate. Move the toolrest often.

Setting the toolrest too low is an invitation for a catch, especially when using a gouge.

When using scrapers, the handle should be tipped up a little, so the butt end is higher than the blade....an exception is when shear scraping.

When scraping on the outside of a bowl cut a little below center. When scraping on the inside of a bowl cut on or a little above center.

Using a scraper near the rim on a thin walled bowl almost guarantees a catch. The wood vibrates and the tool digs in. It's possible to very lightly shear scrape the inside near the rim if your left hand firmly supports the wood on the outside. Can be a bit dicey though. I do it myself on occasion but I don't recommend it

Allowing the hollowing tool shaft to rub on the rim of a hollow vessel is a sure way to break the rim if a catch occurs. Keep the tool away from the rim.

The grind of a bowl gouge is an important factor in preventing catches. The profile of a side grind can be slightly curved in a convex curve but if there is a shoulder at the tip it can be a cause of catches, especially when entering a cut.

When hollowing a bowl with a bowl gouge, care must be taken when entering the wood with the tool. Centrifigal force can cause you to lose control in an instant, possibly damaging the rim. Roll the tool over so that the flute faces the center of the bowl, then start the cut gently with the point of the tool. As the tool enters the wood, swing the handle and roll the tool counter-clockwise so that the flute comes back up to its usual cutting position.

When hollowing a hollowform, never allow the cutter to cut below center. It will dig in causing a rough surface and possible catches.

The aim here is to eliminate the word "catch" from your turning vocabulary!!!