

Dealing with Heavy Timbers on the Lathe or What have I Gotten Myself Into This Time?

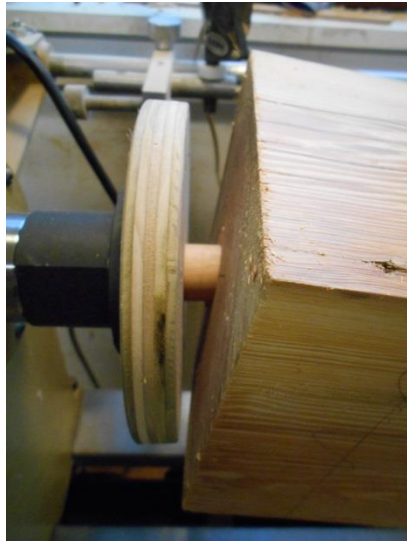
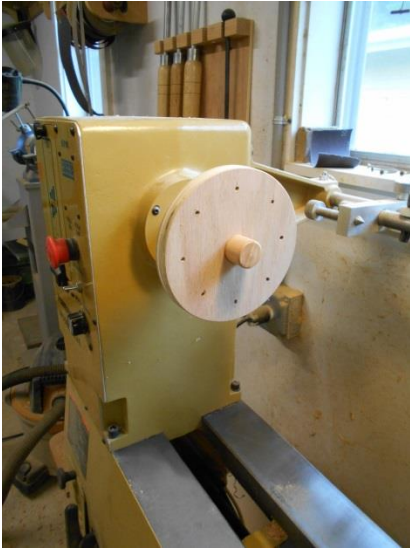
I recently got an order for four newels (the posts at the foot or landing of a stair case). No big deal except that these are fairly large and heavy. The customer provided me with the material, old pine timbers which are 7 inches square, 49 inches long and weighing in at about 50 pounds each before being turned.

Typically I would drive the center into the end of the workpiece and then place it on the lathe by slipping the center into the headstock spindle. Given the size of the material I could see two potential problems with that approach. First of all I didn't like the idea of a chunk of wood (which somewhat resembles a railroad tie) spinning at 500rpm and relying on just the pronged center holding it on a steady axis. I had visions of this thing becoming a newly discovered planet, going into orbit and wiping out me and several machines in the shop. The second problem was simply to lift it into place, center the headstock end and be able to hold it up while adjusting the tailstock end.

Two sections of the newel are left square but I needed to remove the corners on the turned sections to reduce weight and make the turning process a little easier. Usually I would take the corners off at the table saw but I didn't want to lift and move this thing around anymore than absolutely required. Each one was marked and using a Skil saw and chisel I removed the corners. Doesn't need to be pretty, the lathe will take care of the rest. A hole was also drilled on center into each end.



By attaching a plywood disc to the lathe's faceplate I could glue a dowel into the center which gave me an easier way of getting the timber onto the lathe and centered. Screws through the plywood keep the timber attached and spinning. The hole in the tailstock end (same diameter as the tailstock center) makes it easy to line up that end of the workpiece.



The last two photos show one on the lathe just about done and all four completed and I'm very happy in knowing that there were no collisions with objects orbiting wildly about the shop.

