



Hamlet Craft Tools M42 Stay Sharp HSS tools

Mark Baker and Andy Coates put Hamlet's M42 Stay Sharp tools to the test

Hamlet Craft Tools of Sheffield recently introduced a range of M42 tools to its product selection and sent some down for testing. On opening the package, the first thing I noted was the red epoxy-coated coloured ferrules. Coloured ferrules seem in vogue at the moment and I am all for them – they certainly brighten things up.

The handles are made from ash (*Fraxinus* spp.) with a matt finish. The flutes are highly polished and the tools come with a swept-back 45° grind on each, but nothing too radical. The bevels have a relief grind/secondary bevel, which shifts the heel of the bevel a bit closer to the cutting edge, giving you more control when turning internal curved surfaces.

CLOSER INSPECTION

The tools supplied were: 6mm and 10mm bowl gouges fitted to 355mm handles and a 13mm bowl gouge fitted with a 405mm handle. All the bowl gouges come with a Masterflute parabolic flute profile. There were also two spindle gouges 10 and 13mm fitted with 250mm handles,

For information, bowl gouges are measured differently in the UK to the USA. In the UK, bowl gouge sizes are loosely determined by the width of the flute. In the USA the bar diameter used to make the gouge, determines the size of the bowl gouge. So a 13mm bowl gouge is made from 15mm bar and a 6mm bowl gouge is made from 10mm bar, or close to that. Spindle gouges in the USA and UK are sized by the bar diameter.

Unhandled versions of these tools are available with machined handle ends to fit imperial measurement multi-handles. At the time of writing a new spindle roughing gouge has been added to the range and I gather there are more tools to be added.

The gouges come with an easily-removed protective hard-plastic over-shield on the cutting edges to protect the packaging and the unwary. The cutting edge is very sharp straight from the packet. The flutes of the gouges are highly polished, coupled with what looks like a very fine wheel used to sharpen them, creates that fine cutting edge on the gouges.

Using M42 HSS steel for turning tools is said to result in a significantly longer edge life over that of conventional M2 HSS.



The tools received for testing and close-up of a bowl gouge and spindle gouge tip

TESTING

Consistent with previous tests the timber I tried included spruce (*Picea* spp.), pine (*Pinus* spp.), maple (*Acer* spp.), burr elm (*Ulmus* spp.), various Australian burrs and oak (*Quercus* spp.), ash (*Fraxinus* spp.) and other species.

The gouges work well straight from the packets. They can, like any other well-sharpened gouge, be used in pull or push cut mode and, of course, one can manipulate the handle and cutting edge to create shear cuts or no bevel-rubbing scraping cuts. Many turners are likely to be regrinding the tools over time and reshaping and sharpening them was not a problem on aluminum oxide wheels, CBN, wet wheels or belts. They also responded well to hand-honing with diamond or ceramic hones. The Masterflute profiles allow the user to

shape the cutting edge easily as one chooses, whether that be a swept-back profile, straight across conventional grind or anything in between.

CONCLUSION

Whether cutting spindle or faceplate grain oriented timber, the gouges performed significantly better edge-wear wise than the comparative M2 HSS turning tools used for testing. They coped with the most delicate or deliberately heavy-handed cuts well. I would say that for the 10mm gouges, both bowl and spindle, I would like to see longer handles fitted. All the handles fit well in the hand, but on larger gouges the blades are strong enough to project over the rest a long way if required and if one does this, longer handles would provide extra help with control in these situations.

The tools look good and work very well indeed. They take and hold a very sharp edge a long while. Go try one and find out for yourself.

SECOND OPINION FROM ANDY COATES

I received a 10mm Stay Sharp bowl gouge and 10mm spindle gouge to try out. The first task, as ever, was to look at and feel the edge, and I am glad I did this carefully, because straight out of the packet these tools are sharp. They also come pre-ground at 45° in a Celtic/swept-back style with a secondary bevel.

The gouges come with well-shaped and balanced ash handles and a bright red ferrule, which sets them apart from standard HSS tools. The blades are firmly fitted and overall the tools look good quality.

After trying the bowl gouge, which works fine from the packet, I sharpened the gouge to my preferred profile on a CBN

wheel and tried them first on a piece of seasoned beech (*Fagus* spp.). The quality of the edge was immediately apparent. These are sharp tools and they cut cleanly through the dry wood leaving little in the way of problems. Sheer cuts on the wing left a clean finish too. Turning a 350mm bowl was achieved without any problems at all, whether it was the internal or external shape. The flute shape is a good profile to create swept-back grinds, which allows for a range of cutting styles to be undertaken with a single tool. I also tried the tool on a blank of exceptionally dry old oak (*Quercus* spp.) and, just as before, the results were fine with no issues.

After turning half a dozen vessels the edge was only just beginning to dull slightly, and I was being quite aggressive with my cuts to put the tool through the test. One pass on the CBN wheel and the tool was back to its original degree of sharpness.

I predominantly turn spindles in white softwood (*Pinus* spp.), sapele (*Entandophragma cylindricum*) or sycamore (*Acer* spp.) I tried the spindle tool on blanks of all three timbers and perhaps somewhat boringly found no issues whatsoever. I retained the manufacturer's fingernail grind on the spindle gouge and found I preferred it to my own usual grind.

The tool creates a fine, clean cut and produces coves and beads with no surface damage with ease. The handle gives good support but is not so long as to be cumbersome. I had no need to regrind the tool during use and suspect it could turn a considerable number of spindles before it did require regrinding. In this sense it did exactly what it says on the handle. It stayed sharp.

M42 HSS is still considered by some as something quite exotic in woodturning tools. I found the M42 steel performs notably better than standard HSS, and both professional and hobby turners would benefit from this degree of edge durability and sharpness. Not only does it mean fewer trips to the grinder, but it also increases the life of the tool. ●

Technical specs

PRICES:

Spindle gouge 10mm	£30.52
Spindle gouge 13mm	£37.28
Masterflute 6mm bowl gouge	£48.38
Masterflute 10mm bowl gouge	£65.12
Masterflute 13mm bowl gouge	£85.72
Spindle roughing gouge 20mm	£51.10

For further information contact:
Henry Taylor Tools

www.henrytaylortools.co.uk



Turning some burr London plane (*Platanus acerifolia*)