

Serious Super Duty SL2542 Lathe

by Joseph M. Herrmann

For a while now, I have been interested in doing a review of the *Serious Super Duty* SL2542 wood lathe manufactured by *Serious Toolworks, Inc.*, of Medford, Oregon. I've observed the lathe at several symposiums and wondered what it would be like to turn on it. After contacting Scott Trumbo, the Sales and Marketing Manager at *Serious Toolworks* to discuss the logistics of a review, I realized that it wasn't practical to ship a lathe to my home; besides, I really didn't have room in my shop for one. I also learned that the lathe was fairly new to the market and finding a lathe close to my home was also going to be a problem.

This went on for many months until Scott called earlier this year to inform me that someone in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, had purchased a lathe and was willing to let me come to his shop to perform a test drive. I made arrangements with John McCain, Jr., to visit him in July. Ligonier is only about four hours from my home in north-eastern Ohio, and I arranged for my good friend, Bill Blasic, to meet me. Together, we would drive to visit John and his wife (see **Fig. 1**).

JOHN'S SHOP

Bill and I arrived at John's house and were soon escorted to his huge workshop. I bet it was at least 6,000 square feet, if not bigger; the main room alone was probably larger than my entire house. Two other good-sized rooms were off the main area—one housed a significant metal shop and the other housed John's woodworking equipment. A large bathroom was available and a spiral staircase led to

a second-floor library, complete with handcrafted oak bookshelves. I believe there were other rooms in the shop as well, but we didn't see them. The view from the library was of their new home that was currently under construction. I asked John if he was interested in adopting me, but unfortunately, he wasn't.

THE LATHE

I felt a little twinge of remorse when I found out that the lathe was pristine. Due to some health problems, John hadn't even had an opportunity to turn on the lathe and I was going to be the first to do so.

The lathe is quite large and features a 1580 pound, 100% cast-iron frame with a glass-smooth, metallic charcoal finish; the ways are massive—a full 1-3/4" thick, which further helps to dampen vibration. The lathe has a rack-and-pinion tailstock (see **Fig. 2**) and features a 3 hp motor with a magnetic remote emergency stop. You can see how big the lathe is compared to me in **Fig. 3**.

The headstock incorporates spindle-speed digital readout (see **Fig. 4**), index position digital readout, variable-speed control, forward and reverse switch, and emergency stop button. The spindle cartridge weighs 70 pounds and sports four heavy bearings, a 48-position indexing system, and a power lockout safety switch. Both the inboard and outboard spindles feature 1-1/2" x 8 threads, and the lathe has a 25" inboard swing. Both the headstock and tailstock use No. 3 Morse tapers and will turn 42" between centers.



Fig. 1

John and his bride were gracious enough to allow us to use their new lathe for this review.



Fig. 2

The tailstock is massive and you can see the rack at the bottom of the quill.



Fig. 3

I look kind of tiny in comparison to this lathe.



Fig. 4

A lot of information is provided in the digital readouts.

John related that the lathe was easy to move around the shop in spite of its size and weight once they got it off the truck. The three permanently mounted, 6" wheels made positioning the lathe a breeze. Once situated, four 3/4" x 6" feet were screwed down to raise the wheels off the concrete, making the lathe just about immovable (see Fig. 5).

TEST DRIVE

We actually put several pieces of wood on the lathe while we were there, but I will focus on a large, unbalanced piece of red oak that I had brought along. All the other pieces we tried were fairly balanced, since they were slabbed out on a bandsaw mill. However, I cut the red oak with a chainsaw and the surfaces were nowhere near parallel (see Fig. 6). The oak was also dead green, which added extra weight to the already unbalanced blank.

I mounted the oak slab on a screw center I had brought along, and increased the spindle speed until the lathe was spinning quite fast, but the lathe never moved and I was able to bring the blank into round with little effort. I turned a rough shape into the outside and



Fig. 5

The wheels aid in positioning the lathe—once retracted, the lathe is just about immovable.

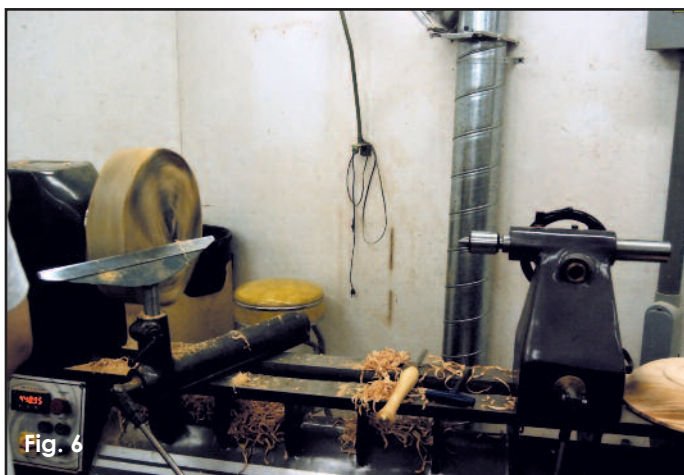


Fig. 6

The lathe took this large chunk of unbalanced oak in stride.



Fig. 7

Turning a rough shape on the exterior of the blank was child's play on this lathe.

prepared the blank so it could be mounted on a 4-jawed chuck that I had also brought along (see Fig. 7). My lathe at home features a 1-1/2" x 8 spindle as well.

Once the blank had been reversed so we could turn out the inside, Bill took a turn (see Fig. 8), and though he was able to slow the lathe down by taking a very aggressive cut, he was not able to stall it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I really liked the lathe and would enjoy having one in my shop. I liked the fact that it was 100% cast iron and that it featured robust headstock/tailstock dimensions, such as the 1-1/2" x 8 spindle and No. 3 Morse tapers at both ends. I also liked the fact that it had a 25"



Fig. 8

Bill took his turn on the lathe by rough-turning the inside.

swing and could turn 42" between centers. The wheel system was a great feature and I wish that other lathe manufacturers would adopt a similar system for their lathes. The lathe lives up to its name—it is a **SERIOUS** piece of equipment.

As with all the reviews, the real test comes down to would I spend my own money on the item. This lathe, in all honesty, should be compared to a luxury car—it's a great machine, with so many fine features that I would like to own, but in all candor, it's a bit out of my price range. If money is no object, then by all means consider buying this lathe!

I did discuss the lathe with my wife and told her that it has now been placed on my "tools to buy when I hit the lottery" list—I liked it so much that it has even overtaken the backhoe that formerly held the No. 1 position on my list. It's a solid lathe, it deserves high marks, and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone who is looking for a large, robust lathe on which to do some **SERIOUS** turning.

Additional information on the lathe is available on the website at www.seriousoolworks.com, or you can e-mail Scott Trumbo at info@seriousoolworks.com.

I would like to thank John and his lovely wife for opening up their shop to Bill and me, and for allowing me the honor of being the first to use his new lathe.

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