



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM STREETER

Mastercarver hanging ultra flex-shaft set

Tom Streeter looks at this flex-shaft set which includes everything you need to get started in rotary power carving, without compromise

The Mastercarver hanging ultra flex-shaft set is a rotary power carving kit which uses a high speed motor to drive hand-held reciprocating carving and detailing tools as well as rotary burr tools through a flexible shaft. The model under test was the 'hanging version' which can be suspended off the bench allowing very good manoeuvrability of the carving tools supplied. The alternative version of this tool is a bench-top mounted motor but this was not available for comparison. The set included a 1/2hp motor

with foot pedal speed control, four handpieces, 10 rotary cutters of different profiles and eight rotary burrs, again with different profiles, four different profile carving tools, manual and a two-year warranty. The four handpieces included in the kit were a key-chuck tool which adjusted to between 0-6mm to hold accessories with 6mm or smaller shanks, a straight and a 90° rotary handpiece which are ideal for very detailed work. The fourth tool was for carving using the different carving blade attachments.

The kit does not include any support or brackets for hanging the motor off the bench so this needs to be taken into account in the initial setup. I found that the kit worked well with the motor suspended from a workshop beam using a length of electrical wire.

The kit is manufactured in the USA and is suitable for any 220-240v electrical supply. It was obvious when inspecting each part of the kit that it was high quality and very well made. The motor was fairly small in size although quite heavy with a speed rating of 0-30,000rpm. With a power of 1/2hp, I was very excited to give it a go, as this is similar to my lathe motor power but very much smaller and faster!

The control of the motor speed

was via a foot operated pedal. This again was very well made and it was easy to control the speed. The length of the flexible shaft was about a metre long which allowed really good control of the hand tools without any snagging of the shaft on the bench. This, I would think, is a big advantage of the 'hanging' version over a bench top kit.

In use

Once a suitable hanger was made it took a little time to get used to the speed control using the foot pedal. Although I was testing the tool out, I would recommend anyone using it to have plenty of practice before attacking a nice carving. The first tool I used was the larger of the two handpieces, fitted with a coarse burr bit. After some experimenting with speeds, I found this to be really fast at removing wood and the power of the machine meant that very little pressure or effort was needed with the speed keeping fairly constant. I tried the various burr bits supplied in the kit on hard and softer woods and each one was very effective with the smaller ones being easier to control. Although the finish was better when high speeds were used, it took some practice to keep the tool under control.

The 90° handpiece was very good for detailed work and easy to control with very fine detail being possible to achieve. I found the best way to use these was to hold them like a pen and use a writing movement. With some practice, I found it to be very accurate and was able to pierce a bowl rim easily with a really good finish.

The handpieces

One very useful feature of this tool was the ability to operate the rotary tool in both directions. On some woods that I tested the burrs I found tear out and this could be reduced by reversing the direction of rotation. This meant that the burr could be cut with the grain giving a better finish and one that is easier to achieve.

The carving handpiece needed some practice to set the best speeds and to get used to how much pressure needed to be applied. I experimented with carving a bowl rim with various depths and shapes of carving. Because the tool

comes with four different carving blade profiles, many different shapes can be made. After some practice, I found this easy to use and control with some really nice shapes from the various tools.

Verdict

I found it easy and quick to change tools in all of the handpieces and the vibrations from the tools were only quite small. I did find that although the tools were easily controlled, it was a bit tiring and I did take a break after about 15 minutes, particularly when using the piercing attachments.

The manual provided with the kit was mainly aimed at describing how to maintain the tools, how to change/insert bits and the health and safety of using the kit. As with most of the woodturning tools and equipment that I have seen, the manual did not explain how to get the best from the kit or provide any ideas and suggestions for using all the bits and carving tools. I used the techniques with this kit that people like Mick

Hanbury have shown me and demonstrated at the various shows and I was really pleased with the results I was able to achieve when using all the different tools included in the kit. ▶



Specifications

- Heavy duty, 1/2hp, 0-30,000 rpm motor
- Compatible with 220-240V power supply only
- Set includes: foot pedal speed control, 4 handpieces, 10 rotary cutters, 8 rotary burrs, 4 carving tools, manual and 2-year warranty

Price: £299.50 (inc VAT)
 Contact: Classic Hand Tools
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