

Wheely Fun

Custom-turned wheels yield endless possibilities

BY RICHARD RAFFAN



Whenever I've asked people with young children which toys are the favorite, the answer almost invariably is "Anything with wheels."

Wheels less than 3 in. dia. are generally made using end-grain wood with the grain parallel to the lathe axis. It is easier to work this way, and the wood wears more evenly

than does cross-grain. You can make a set of wheels from a single blank held in a chuck, so it's easier to make them exactly the same diameter. Wheels with the grain running across the face have to be cut out and turned individually, so making sets the same size becomes much more difficult.

Wheel design

How you attach a wheel to its axle affects how it looks and how you go about making it. Wheels can either be fixed to an axle or rotate on an axle. The drawing on p. 81 shows three options for mounting a pair of wheels. My preference

is for a one-piece axle with wheels fixed to it. I think an enclosed axle is the neatest solution. The wheel is easy enough to make using a chuck with dovetail jaws, provided you can drill the stopped hole for the axle precisely at center. The major advantage of this wheel design is that it's easy to detail each face.

How to turn enclosed-axle wheels

This wheel is made in two stages. First, turn either a short tenon or a groove to fit your chuck jaws, then use it to hold the blank while you complete the other side.

If either the tenon or wheel diameter is exactly the same diameter as the chuck

