

Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions

Where can I get the best pricing on pen kits? The range of prices is staggering and I'm thoroughly confused, especially with all the conflicting chatter on social media.

The answer to the question might be a bit indirect. You always need to shop for value, in my opinion. There will be very inexpensive kits available from some suppliers. That may or may not be what you're after in the long run. Depending on the source, the fit and finish may leave something to be desired, especially after it has been used and has worn and aged somewhat. As you move further up the price scale, you'll find that the fit, finish, and durability usually gets better. Another thing that factors into the cost is the volume and popularity of the kit. Being produced and purchased from the factory in the thousands versus the hundreds has a dramatic influence on the price from the producer to the reseller. Of course, different vendors have different mark-ups so that will factor into the resale cost. For example, a lower-cost 7mm kit offered by virtually everyone can range from a dollar and change through five to 10 or so dollars. Is there a quality difference? I believe so but you need to determine that not only will it show up in your end customer, but it will also show up in the service that you get. For the most part, the real bargain basement suppliers often leave much to be desired in service should you need it. Like anything, you usually get what you pay for. Poor service is usually the



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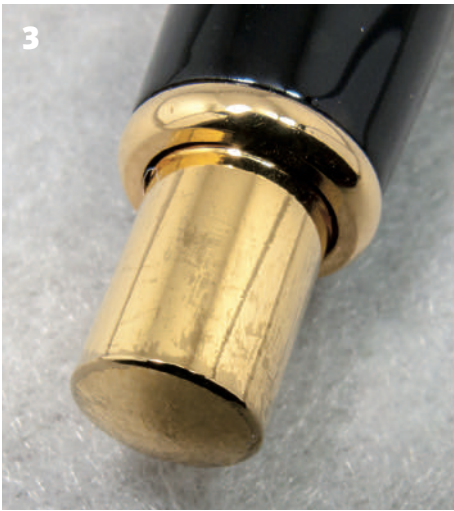
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1 Of the component parts in the pen kit bag, the ones that will get the most abuse are the external one. Bumps, dings, hand acids, heat, and other abuse take a toll

2 Some pens I've gathered to show examples of parts that have not weathered the use, or abuse, they have seen during their lifetime



1C



reason for the social media trashing of some retailers. In my opinion, the amount of time and energy you will spend on a kit far eclipses whatever cost of the original materials. If you factor in labour, other materials, and any overhead, a dollar or two more for the kit itself is inconsequential. I find that buying wisely – i.e. buying for value from a decent retailer that offers selection, quality product, and service – is worth a bit more.

Unless you are just catering to those who need to pinch every penny, your end customer is often willing to pay a bit more for something that will look good, fit well, and last. Part of the problem with social media is that anyone can say anything without regards to accuracy. When people trash a company or another individual, it usually stays that way with many chiming in with their own sob story. There is rarely any chance that rebuttal will correct inaccuracies or bias. Always take social media criticism with a grain of salt. Sometimes it is accurate and other times it isn't. I try to order in quantity to get better pricing. I never use the 'cheap' materials for any of my kit pens but opt for the somewhat upscale kits. For 7mm kits, I find the TiN-coated stuff or other special plating wears far better, lasting far longer and looking good too. The few dollars difference is well worth it from my perspective. Should you still be looking for that bargain kit, there are many mail order vendors you can select from. An alternative is to go in with the various groups or clubs to do a direct factory buy. Large quantities have attractive pricing but potentially come with the other issues.



3 Even parts of the pen that don't get much handling can show their poor wear and ageing characteristics. Doesn't say much for the quality of the maker's kit selection **4** Another example of poor wear from a bargain kit. The nib is the most touched and felt part of the pen. Degradation here is so evident and undesirable **5** My belief is that the time and energy that it takes to do a custom casting for a pen deserves a quality kit. A few dollars saved pales compared to the time value **6** A pen done as a gift for a friend. Even if created to offer for sale, how will the recipient feel should the plating tarnish, corrode, or delaminate? **7** Some additional gnarly pens collected with less-than-ideal components. When you want to economise, perhaps there are less obvious places in your process **8** My first cast pen, circa 2005, has held up well. The components are all original, being the upscale kits with TiN coatings. Well worth the few extra dollars in my opinion



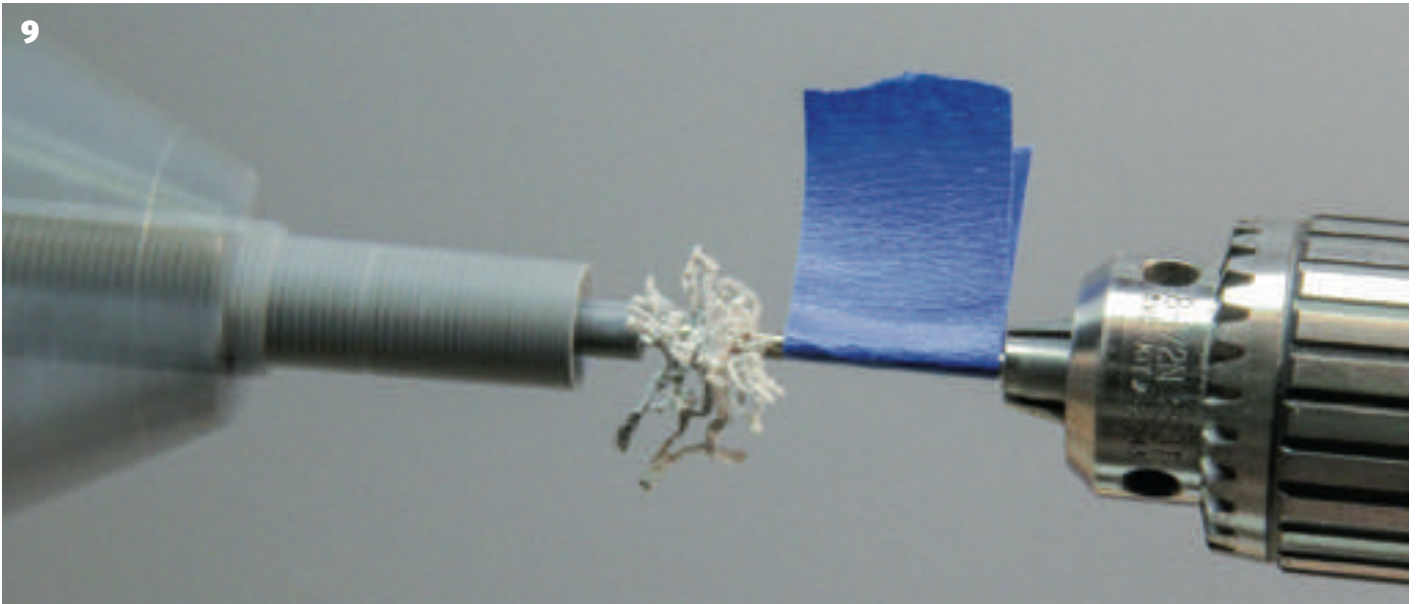
◀ **In many of the Q&As, you refer to speeds and feeds. I'm not certain that I really understand what this means, particularly with respect to turning. Can you help me understand?**

The term 'speeds and feeds' is most often heard in the machining industry or businesses doing fabrication involving cutting. Whether cutting, drilling, or another removal process (remember sanding is a cutting and removal process), speed refers to the cutter rpm and feed refers to the advancement rate of the cutting process. A simple example is drilling a hole. The speed is the rpm of the drill and the

feed is how fast the drill is being advanced. Feed often includes the force or pressure being applied. The real importance of speeds and feeds is how appropriate it is for the size of the cut and the relationship to the material's cutting characteristics. A 1/2 in hole in a soft wood can be drilled at a modest rpm and advanced relatively quickly with a sharp cutter.

Drilling that same hole in a harder wood or metal will require a slow rpm, some lubricant, and a slower feed. I use the term often when referring to woodturning. Everything applies perfectly. If you are roughing a bark-covered log, you'll run the lathe at a slow rpm and

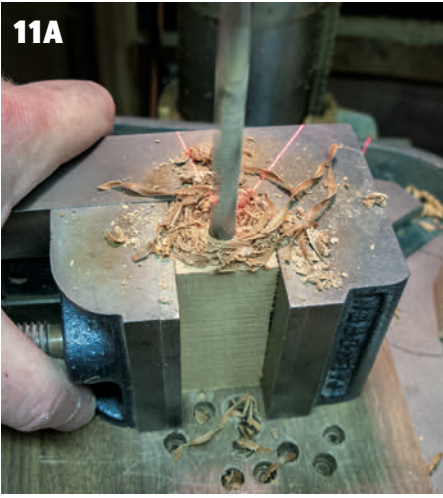
make light cuts with a sharp tool. Once it has been roughed to round and in balance, the rpm can be increased and the rate of travel of the cutter face (your turning tool of choice) can also be increased. Of course, your feed is interactive with your depth of cut. Serious removal of stock without regard to great surface finish is far different to finishing cuts with a light touch. Sometimes it seems odd when you think that on the lathe the material is rotating, therefore it is the cutter rpm. The feed is your depth of cut and traverse speed. Perhaps just simply said as how fast is the cutting face cutting and how hard and fast are you pushing captures the gist of speeds and feeds.



9 Successful speeds and feeds are chosen based on the material being cut, the type of cutting, the sharpness of the cutter, and the amount of work being done

10 Denser materials, larger diameters, better finish, deeper pockets (more heat and drag), lube or lack of depending on material will all impact proper speeds and feeds





11 Fixturing and rigidity also can make a difference in your speeds and feeds selection. Part of any successful drilling, milling, cutting, or sanding process is letting the tool do the work **12** Don't forget that removing the offal from the process is important as well. Sometimes pausing to clear the chips, or 'breaking' the chip is needed **13** Excess S&F in action. Left – plastic and wood drilled with proper S&F. Right – S&F too high. Notice the burnished I.D. of the wood and the melting and recast of the plastic

I'm looking to buy pen kits featuring my favourite sports teams. There doesn't seem to be a big selection. Where can I get the pros and college teams logos on pens?

Nearly every organisation will trademark, or service mark, any images, logos, particular identifying sayings, or advertising jingles, etc. they use. This allows them to control if, when, where, and how these items are used. Obviously, your favourite major league team doesn't want their name or images sullied by use in some undesirable manner. Licensing also provides another income stream for the school, company, or team. If you see the bargain-basement guys offering sports team logo items, chances are they are not licensed to do so. They can often fly below the radar and escape being chased by the legal folks for their deeds. For a vendor to offer these items, whether featuring a local group or national/international organisation's trademarked images, they must license them from the owners or their designated licensing agents. This added cost gets tacked on to the cost you pay when you purchase the item and then added costs get paid by the end purchaser as well. You can usually tell whether the image is licensed by the 'calibre' of the vendor.

Bargain-basement newcomers to the business might be questionable while the long-standing full-service retailer is likely not. Nearly all of the licensed images will have some indication on the advertising, packaging, or item indicating that it is 'officially licensed'. I find that if a company is offering team logo-marked products that they advertise, they are likely officially licensed since an internet website or other easily available advertising puts them under scrutiny. If you wish to find team-adorned products, do a quick internet search to discover the dealers with these products. You'll find that any company willing to jump through the licensing hoops will do a quality job on the logo. Backstreet vendors will copy artworks to use, and without the artwork masters being provided, the quality isn't there. Some folks are using decals to apply team markings to their turnings, whether pens, cups, or other item. Same issue applies. If you do it for yourself, you'll likely have no issues. If you do it and offer it for sale, you can run into issues if you capture the attention of the folks with rights to the image.