

Ask the Pro

Why is a Tool Rest Support Called a Banjo?

Between September 2009 and March 2010, the C.O.W. newsletter featured a forum in which members could ask the club's more experienced woodturners questions. What follows is one of the questions asked and the pros' answers.

The support that holds the tool rest is called a "Banjo". How did it get this name?

Floyd Anstaett:

I really don't have any idea where the term banjo originated. I tried to getting some info off the computer but it seems to be one of those descriptive terms that sort of disappear into obscurity as far as it's origin is concerned.

A banjo is a banjo because the first book that I read on turning said it was.

In looking around on the web, I found these two references to the banjo.

<http://www.peter.hemsley.btinternet.co.uk>

The spindle on the lathe is mounted in bearings in the headstock and is caused to rotate by the motor. The headstock assembly is mounted on the lathe bed, which is the support which keeps all of the components of the lathe rigidly aligned. At the other end of the lathe bed is the tailstock, which supports the end of the workpiece and which can be moved along the bed to suit different lengths of workpiece. The tailstock usually also incorporates a sliding barrel, or 'quill' which can be moved in and out by turning a handwheel, thus giving fine positional control and enabling end-loading to be applied to the workpiece. Also movably mounted on the lathe bed is the toolrest saddle which supports the toolpost and toolrest. **The toolrest saddle - sometimes also known as a 'banjo' because of the shape of this part on earlier lathes** - is moved into position such that the tool can be rested on the toolrest and reach the workpiece with full support. And that's about it for the essentials. Many lathes don't have any supporting structure beneath the bed and need to be mounted on a robust table or bench. Others come complete with a floor standing frame, or may indeed be integrated designs. Speed changing is normally effected by moving belts onto different-sized pulleys but many newer lathes now incorporate electronic variable speed systems and a few have mechanical speed variation systems - like the one in our photograph which shows a PooleWood PW28-40 heavy duty lathe.

<http://eclgy.com/?cx=partner-pub-2573932102663475%3Aum0bm1-8o21&forid=1&ie=ISO8859-1&cof=FORID%3A9&q=Banjo%20%20Wood%20Lathe#978>

In the craft of woodturning, a banjo's a common term for a fixture on the wood lathe, mounted on the lathe's bed, for holding the toolrest. It allows for adjustment of the toolrest in various positions, by the lathe operator, making it possible to hold the turning tool in the most convenient position for removing material from the spinning wood. The chosen position of the fixture can be locked in place on the lathe's bed in various ways, the most common

method being a lever at the forward end of... ([More on Banjo Wood Lathe](#))

[Barb Crockett:](#)

As for the banjo question, well; I'm a musician so I guess "It came from Alabama"??????