#  Carve a Broody Hen

Our assorted hens are busy in the yard most days, scratching and pecking. Sometimes, however, one will decide to become a little bit broody and settle herself in one of the nesting boxes, when she becomes fluffed up and rounded in shape as she sits snuggled up in the straw.

A broody hen is a nice project for a weekend, and can be carved any size you like depending upon the wood you have available. The techniques are the same; just use smaller or larger tools.

Preparation

From my firewood pile I chose an alder log *(Alnus glutinosa)* 255mm (10in) diameter and approximately 180mm (7in) height, an unusual timber which becomes a lovely tan colour when oiled or polished. As long as it is sound you can use any type of wood of any size that will fit securely in your vice whilst you are working. Look for a section of log with a diameter of approximately one and a half times its height, and there is no need to remove the bark before you start carving.

Preliminary cuts

Draw a centreline across the top of the log and saw off a wedge shaped sector above both wings (see gallery photo 2). Saw off a wedge shaped sector across the breast and below the tail. On the top surface make two angled saw cuts towards the centre of the log, down the back of the neck and front of the tail

Start shaping

Using a mallet and 1/2in or 5/8in No.8, 9, 10 or 11 gouge, round over the bottom edge and remove the sawn surfaces. Remove the area between the two saw cuts and make the head and tail stand proud. Round the whole body of the hen, changing the direction of cut at the most convex area so that you do not split the timber (see gallery image 3). Direct your cuts towards the tip of the tail and the back of the head (see gallery image 4). Leave a small flat area along the top of the head and the tail (see gallery image 5). Decide which of the two tapered sections will be the head and which the tail and cut towards the highest part from all round the head and reduce the thickness of the head each side (see gallery image 6)

Start the tail

On the rear end, mark the tail as a triangular area. Cut a channel along the curved path along the bottom of the triangle using a 1/2in or 3/4in No.3 gouge (see gallery image 7). Make the channel deeper in the middle (see gallery image 8). Cutting towards the channel, begin hollowing the triangular area using the No.9 gouge (see gallery image 9). Re-cut the channel deeper across the base of the tail and repeat the scooping process. Round over the lower edge of the channel into the hollow.

Adjust the shape of the rear end to make it nicely rounded (see gallery image 10) and smooth inside it with the No.3 or 5 gouge. Now on the outer surface of the tail, slightly hollow and pare both sides up to the tip until both sides are the same thickness - you can test for this by feeling them between your finger and thumb

Start the head

First, the head is shaped into a disc by rounding the front and the back of it with the 1/2in No.3 or 5 gouge and cutting towards the top of it until it is no longer flat on top.

Cut a channel across the throat, curving to each side of the neck using the 1/2in No.3 gouge (see gallery image 11). Cut back into the channel towards the breast to undercut the head/beak area.

Round the upper edge of the breast into the channel. The head should be disc-like when viewed from the side, and the breast rounded into her neck (see gallery image 12).

Finally, smooth both sides of the face and chamfer its edges, paring with the 1/2in or 3/4in No.3 gouge, ready to carve the comb and the eyes later on

Finishing the tail

Pare the top of the tail from all round until the original sawn surface has been removed along the top, then using the V-tool, cut the separation between the two main tail feathers at the tip of the tail (see gallery image 13). Scallop each edge of the tail to delineate the tail feathers and round over the ends of the feathers using the No.3 gouge inverted (see gallery image 14).

Hollow the outer surface of each of the tail feathers using the 1/2in No.5 gouge, making a gentle ridge between each one. Smooth each hollow with a curved scraper

Finishing the head and face

With the V-tool, cut round the face and towards each end of the comb. Using the 3/8in No.3 gouge with opposing cuts, deepen the V-cut then remove its adjacent surfaces, including both ends of the comb (see gallery image 15). Round over the edge of the face into the now deepened channel, and repeat the process, cutting back deeper at the base and both ends of the comb. The comb stands proud of the top of the head (see gallery image 16).

Smooth the surface of the face and beak using the 3/4in No.3 gouge inverted, and repeat the procedure on the other side of the head (see gallery image 17).

Paring with the 3/4in No.3 gouge, narrow down each side of the beak to make it symmetrical with an apex along its length (see photo 18).

Cut the outlines of the wattles using the V-tool. A hollow is made within each wattle using a 1/4in No.9 gouge (see photo 19). From each side, make a series of indents along the length of the comb

Texturing the breast and rear end

Using chalk as a guide, draw the extent to which you want the breast texturing, and mark where you will have to change the direction of your cuts, which will be at the most convex place. Using a deep gouge such as 5/8 No.8, 9 or 10, begin with a row of short cuts along the base of the bird. Behind this and still cutting in the same direction, cut a second row, staggering each cut so it does not run into the ones previously made. Repeat, row by row, leaving no gaps, until the chip is no longer released cleanly, at the midway line and where you will need to change the direction in which you are cutting. Turn the carving and repeat the process, this time starting at and cutting towards the head until the whole breast area has been covered (see gallery image 20). Then carry out texturing the rear end in the same way (see gallery image 21)

Neck and wing feathers

The neck feathers are cut using the V-tool, making a series of grooves which curve from the neck towards the head and wattles (see gallery image 22). Make two or three shallow grooves across each wing to represent the primary feathers using a wide No.5, 6 or 7 gouge (see gallery image 23)

Finishing the beak

Using the 3/4in No.3 gouge inverted, reduce its thickness by paring the sides of the beak at the same time retaining its apex (see gallery image 24). Cut towards the centre, up towards the comb and along the apex, beginning the cuts at the top and working towards this from the tip of the beak. Then from beneath the beak, with the 1/4in No.9 gouge, from each side cut in towards the throat from the edge of each wattle to remove under the beak (see photo 25). Change to a 1/4in No.3 gouge and deepen the triangular area between the wattles by tilting the gouge beneath first (see gallery image 26), then cutting inwards until the beak projects, when you can then smooth the base of the throat and the inner edges of both wattles

Finishing the broody hen

Remove any remaining errant cuts, splinters or sharp edges through careful paring. There are several finishes that could be applied - I used linseed oil to bring out the deep tan colour of my alder wood (see gallery image 27), though Danish Oil would be just as suitable, as would a light wax polish which could then be buffed to a shine using a soft brush. Your hen is now ready to nest!