

A Home-made Blockbuster By Ken Lum

As I close in on finishing my **Mantua English Carronade** model, I came to the step where I needed to rig up the gun tackles used to haul the real carronade out through the gun port in preparation for firing. The blocks I used for this were 9 mm kit blocks from **Syren Models** that needed to be assembled and their edges rounded to shape.

Rounding the blocks to shape is best done with a block sanding device consisting of a cylindrical container with a lid lined in its interior with around #200 grit sandpaper. Then a shaft is driven through the rotational axis of the cylinder that has sandpaper paddles attached to the shaft that rotates with the shaft while the cylinder is held stationary as the shaft is spun with a hand drill. All in all, this works like a rock tumbler for ship's blocks.

Model Shipways offers a \$10 kit of such a tool they call a "**Blockbuster**" consisting of a plastic cylindrical container and a shaft with wooden paddles that have sandpaper stuck on them (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. **Blockbuster** by **Model Shipways**.
(Photos courtesy **Micro-Mark**, Todd Wardwell)

Upon watching a YouTube video of this device in action, I decided to just make my own out of an empty can with a plastic lid that once held bean dip (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Home-made block sander made from a bean dip can.

I felt the wooden paddles in the **Model Shipways Blockbuster** were not necessary, and felt they tended to bang into the interior sides of the can and sometimes break off.

Instead, I made the paddles entirely out of folded sandpaper glued and thumbtacked to a rectangular piece of wood locked to a $\frac{1}{4}$ "-20 threaded shaft with lock nuts on either side of the wood (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Sandpaper paddle of the block sander.

This will sand the blocks smooth and rounded but be flexible enough to accommodate to the walls of the can without breaking off or causing the paddles to stop spinning.

To make the spinning process easier, I spun the device in the chuck of my **Unimat 3 lathe** while I held the can stationary with my hand and the other end of the shaft is steady-rested in the tail stock chuck without locking it (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Left-Blockbuster sander mounted in Unima 3 lathe. Right-Rounded model blocks after being spun in the Blockbuster.

After spinning the blocks in the container for a period of time, I would periodically stop and examine the blocks to see if I had rounded them well enough to look realistic. Then I would stain and use the blocks.