



Core Sound Style

Jerry Talton demonstrates how to carve a ruddy the way they used to do it in North Carolina.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH HENDRICKSON

North Carolina's Core Sound-style decoys can trace their influences to blocks carved on the Jersey and Maryland shores and on down the Chesapeake in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many sportsmen from these areas brought their own stools down to the Carolinas when they hunted with the many famous gunning clubs along the Carolina shores. Local fishermen and boat builders also guided hunts at many of these clubs during the fall and winter migrations, so they saw these blocks and adapted many of the styles into their own carvings.

A true Core Sound bird could be made from many different materials, but it was often recycled from some other source. North Carolina's Outer Banks were notoriously treacherous for ships, and locals salvaged masts, decks, and hulls as well as rigging hardware from wrecks to make the area's somewhat primitive decoys. Carvers rarely had the money to acquire glass eyes for their birds, so they often gave their decoys carved or painted eyes. Many had no eyes at all. The makers also made ballast weight from flattened net weights, pieces of drive shafts, railroad spikes, or the

heavy spikes used to secure the decks and hulls of the battered wrecks. It was also commonplace for the carvers to recycle other carvers' blocks that had drifted off or were discarded when heads broke off. This sometimes makes it difficult to identify the actual carvers.

Jerry Talton started carving decoys about ten years ago after he purchased a decoy for his brother's Christmas present. He was already a surfboard and skateboard maker and had many of the tools so he decided to try his hand at carving decoys. Living in the heart of the region where traditional Carolina carvers had chopped out their coastal stools, Jerry found carving resources everywhere. He gained inspiration from a copy of Jack Dudley's book, *Carteret Waterfowl Heritage* and he obtained more information when he stopped by a small decoy shop in Betty, North Carolina, and met Gail Gerringer. Gail gave Jerry tips on wood selection and pattern drawing, but most importantly, she encouraged him to develop his own style. Curt Salter, one of the founding fathers of the Core Sound Decoy Carving Guild, encouraged Jerry to use

TOOLS

- Carving hatchet
- Tack hammer
- Straight-edged and curved-edged carving knives
- Bent blade carving knife
- Scorp
- Spoon plane
- Spokeshave
- Sculptor's adze

- Round hand gouges
- Bar clamps
- Heavy large sanding block and coarse sandpaper
- 3/8" Forstner bit
- 1/8" drill bit
- 1" fishtail skew
- Hand drill
- Branding iron and heat source

MATERIALS

- Rusted 1 1/2" nails
(Tremontnail.com CLR4)
- 3 1/2" stainless self-tapping screw
- Titebond III
- White quick-drying Gorilla Glue
- Tapered 7/16" wooden plugs

traditional materials and hand tools to carve his birds.

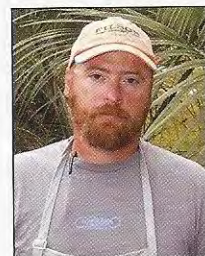
As his style evolved, Jerry's work shifted to Core Sound-style decoys. Other influential carvers, including "Hurricane" Pete Peterson, J.P. Hand, Dr. Chuck May, and Walter "Brother" Gaskill, pushed Jerry to make truly traditional decoys instead of decoys that *looked* traditional. Being a true perfectionist, Jerry set out to do the absolute best.

Jerry's ruddy pattern is a beautiful representation of a classic Core Sound-style decoy from the days of market gunning. It is fairly simple to carve and uses traditional juniper or white cedar as the wood. These blocks were normally chopped out using a hatchet and carving knife. A few nails attached the heads and the paint was minimal, usually using what was left in the boat shed.



Keith Hendrickson (left) is a freelance artist/writer/photographer who also works for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. He has been carving rough working decoys for around 30 years and won best of show at the Ward Museum's Chesapeake Challenge.

You can learn more about Jerry Talton (right) by visiting his website at www.jerrytaltondecoys.com or emailing him at jerrytaltondecoys@gmail.com.

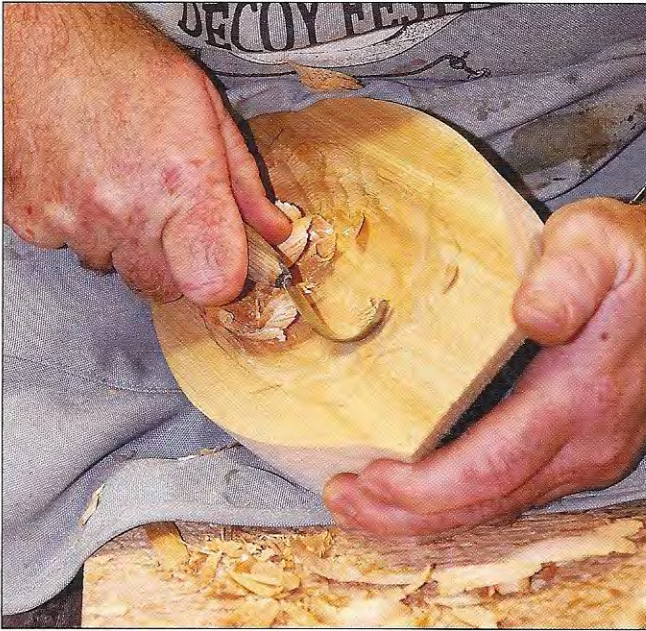


1 Jerry starts his bird with a typical cutout done on the band saw. He uses two pieces for a lighter block, hollowing the two halves before gluing them together. He made this particular decoy body from two pieces of juniper. He used a pair of screws to hold the pieces together while cutting on the band saw, paying attention to the grain of the wood to insure the hatchet cuts the wood instead of splitting it. Try to keep the center of the tree grain toward the center of the decoy to avoid splits. Note that the chine line on this pattern matches the line the two halves will form.

2 Remove the screws separating the two halves and then mark the cut points for hollowing the bird. Make notes on the shallower areas at the tail and head. You won't want to go too deeply in these areas to avoid cutting through the body when you actually carve the block.



3 Sitting on a traditional New Jersey-style carver's bench, Jerry uses a sculptor's adze to make his initial cuts into the center of each half. If you are not comfortable using hatchet-type tools, you can also do this with large gouges or a carving scorp.



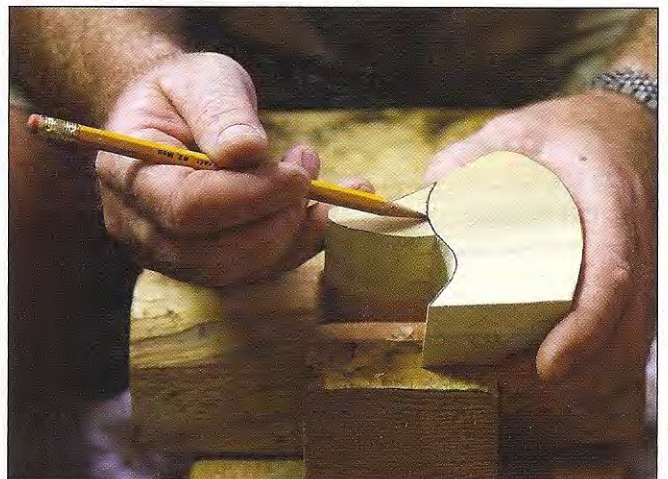
4 After making the initial deep cuts, Jerry removes most of the wood with a gouge, switching over to a bent knife to clean things up.



5 This is how the two halves should look once you have finished hollowing.



6 Jerry glues the two halves together using the quick drying white Gorilla Glue. He wets one side per gluing instructions, and then runs a double ring of glue around one of the halves. He places the halves together and, using the top flat cutout, matches them up and clamps them together to allow the glue to dry thoroughly.



7 While the glue is drying, start the head. Kiln-dried wood is best here. On your cutout, draw in the bill line on each side of the head. Extend this line across the top and bottom of the head.



8 While holding your pencil, use your middle finger as a guide against the wood while you mark your bill width on both sides of the head.



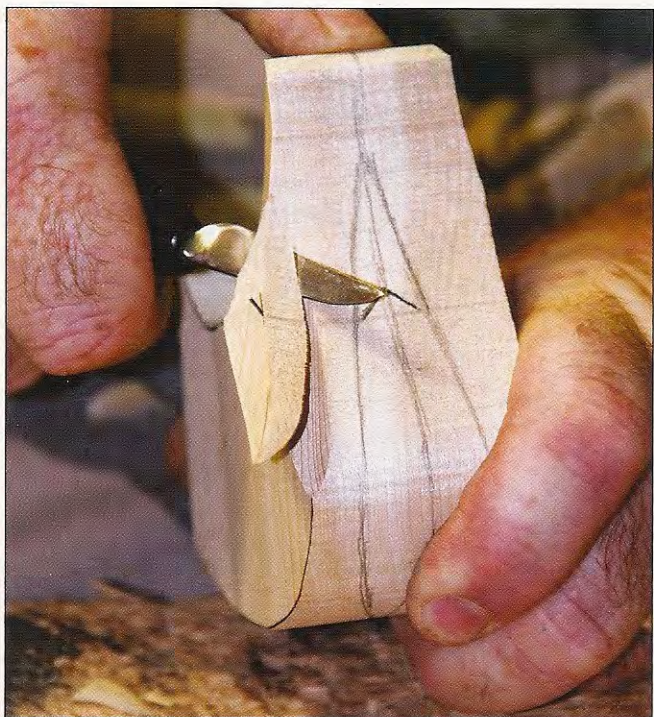
9 A ruddy has a wide bill at the front, so draw this onto the bottom of the bill, flaring it out to the front about $\frac{1}{8}$ " on each side. Then draw in your centerline all the way around the head. At the base of the neck, draw in your neck circle and round out the corners.



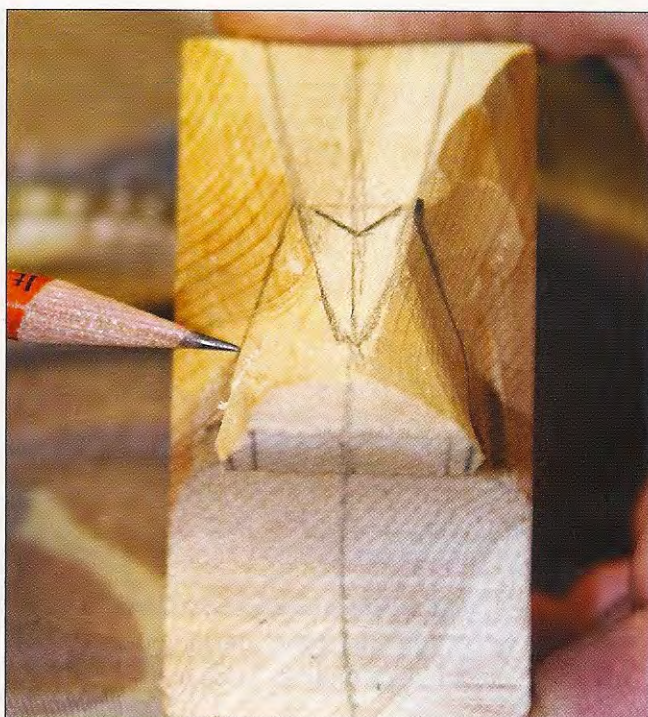
10 On the top side of the head, draw in the V-notch of the bill, indicating the top of the bill width (about $\frac{3}{8}$ "), the flattened v portion of the bill, and the top of the crown ($\frac{3}{4}$ " wide).



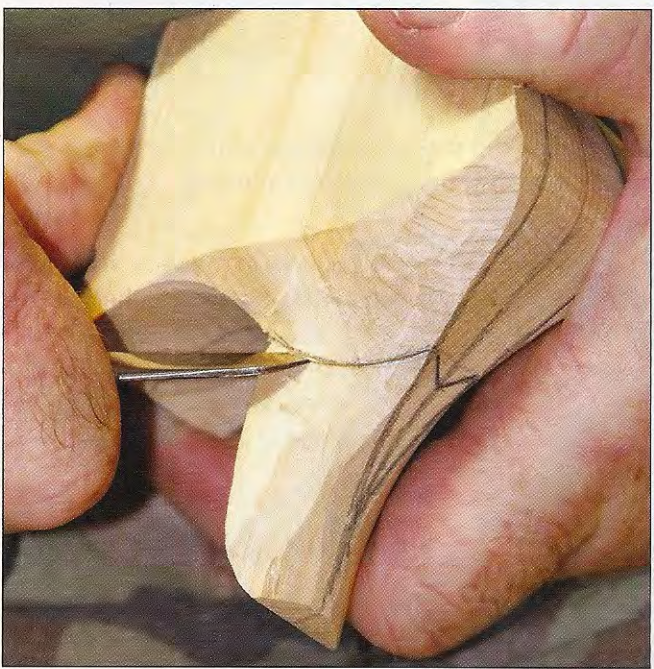
11 Start your carving by rounding in the neck on the underside of the head. Make a good $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep cut straight into the head right at the line at the base of the bill. Then remove the wood on each side of this cut. Do this on both sides of the bill and then extend the front portion of the cuts forward along the bill width lines.



12 From the top of the head, start carving the front taper into the bill and begin shaping. Work on both sides of the head at the same time, cutting in to your guide lines to insure you get things symmetrical without carving in too far. Avoid carving too far into the front of the face, too.



13 Redraw your bill lines. Viewed from the front these lines should be nice and straight. If you see them curve outward anywhere, this indicates an area where you need to do more carving. Make sure the curves are symmetrical when you look down on the top of the head.



14 Now slice in the bill margins. Starting at the top of the bill, slice from the bill into the head, angling to the back slightly. Do this on both sides.



15 Cut straight in for the V-notch and then angle down into your cut from the top of the head.



16 Now slice in from the cheek into your initial cut to remove the wood from the cheek, defining the bill. Then round out the neck on both sides at the front of the throat.



17 Round the back of the neck from the base of the neck on up to the crown of the head. Round and shape the tip of the bill, leaving enough thickness to keep the bill strong. Then check the head from the top, bottom, and both sides to insure everything is symmetrical.

18 Flatten the top of the bill and make sure there are no saw marks showing from your initial cutout.



19 Carve in the neck slightly to define the cheek and then sand the entire head. You don't have to get it completely smooth and can even leave a few coarse sand marks here and there.



20 Looking at the head from the front, a typical Core Sound-style bird will be fairly flat from the cheek to the crown of the head and the angle of the bill will match the angle of the front profile of the head.



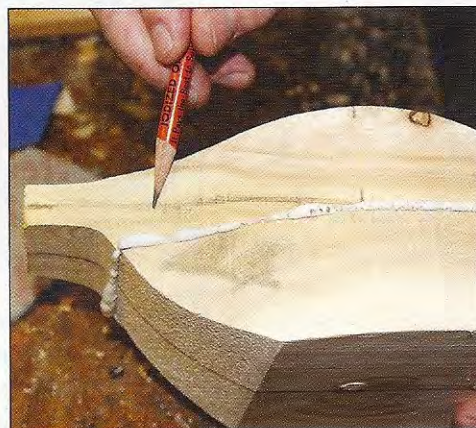
21 Now that the glue has dried, remove your clamps from the body. If you used screws to hold the body together while doing the initial cutout, it is time to fill these holes. Jerry drills out the screw holes with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " Forstner bit and then fills them with tapered wooden plugs, matching the direction of the grain in the plug with the grain in the body. Apply a small amount of Titebond III to the holes, tap in the plugs, then use a flat chisel or skew to cut the plug off flush with the bottom of the block.



22 Place the head onto the head shelf and draw around it to indicate the head placement. You can also draw in an arrow pointing in the direction the head will be turned if you decide to turn it.



23 Draw in your centerline all the way around the bird. Also draw in lines indicating the "ice scoop," the cut that allows water to flow from the back on down around the neck. Add marks for the peak on the shoulders, and a mark showing the high point on the back.



24 Transfer the high point on the back onto the side and mark it. Continue the line down to the center of the chine where the halves are glued together and make another mark. Now draw a line from the center of the tail down to this center point. This will be the back chine on the bird. The front chine is the cut. Do the same on the other side.



25 Using a carving hatchet, Jerry begins rounding the bottom front of the bird. He rotates and positions the bird so he can maintain the same chopping motion at the same angle. The hatchet moves along the same plane at all times. Carve the bird in quarters. Do the bottom front first as one quarter. Switch to the back end as the second quarter. Round up from the bottom to the chines on the sides. Then touch up the bottom by rounding the bottom sides to make the front lines and curves flow to the back.



26 Switch to the top of the bird. Work on rounding down both sides towards the tail, making sure you don't cut too far over your guide lines. Then round forward, making sure you leave the high areas at the front of each shoulder.



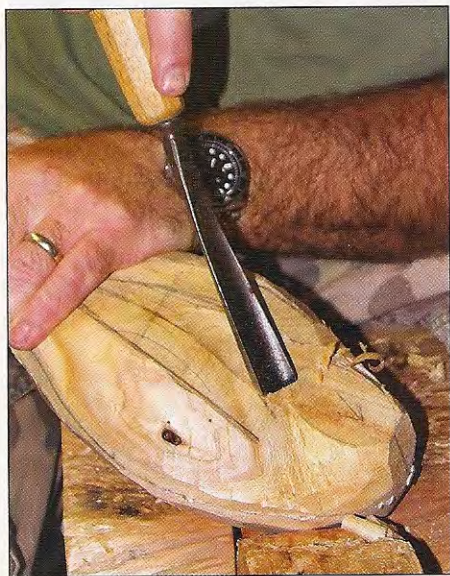
27 Once the breast is round, chop in at each shoulder from the back forward to set your shoulder depth. Note the angle of the cut runs from the cape forward to the breast.



28 Flip the bird around and carefully chop in against the grain up to your previous shoulder cuts to remove the wood in front of the shoulders.



29 Once both shoulders are cut in, use a scorp or a spoon plane to cut the ice scoop from the cape down and in from the middle of the back to the head shelf.



30 With a large round gouge, finish cutting from the ice scoop on down to the breast, between the shoulder and the head shelf. This helps form the transition from the neck of the bird into the body.



31 At this point, all the chopping is done. Using a spokeshave, knife, and flat fishtail skew, Jerry refines the body shape and symmetry. On the bottom of the bird, he works up a flat spot to locate the small pad weight. Placing the weight into position at the end of the keel line, he uses a hammer to tap and shape the weight to match the curve of the bottom of the bird. Outline the weight location with a pencil onto the bottom.



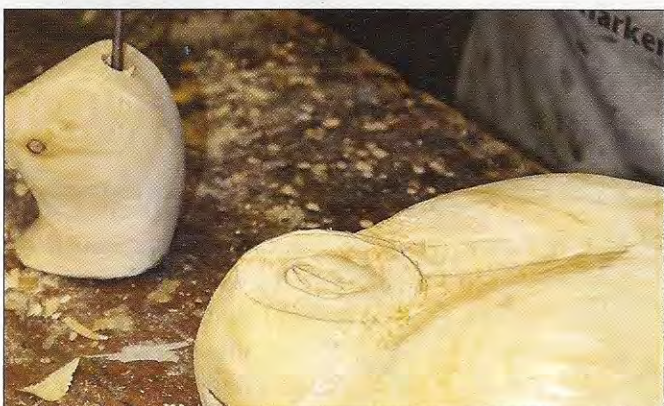
32 Jerry uses a flat fishtail skew to carve and shape the tail on both sides. A curved-blade knife is also useful for working in the transition area of the tail and body. Check the bottom and top for symmetry and make any needed adjustments with a knife or spokeshave.



33 Use your pencil to draw in the tail's shape. Round the tail and thin it to the desired thickness with a knife.



34 A 3 1/2" stainless self-tapping screw, running down through the center of the neck, will attach the head to the body. Use a 3/8" Forstner bit and sink a hole about 3/8 of an inch deep into the back of the head. Position this hole where it will run through the center of the neck. Then use a long 1/8" drill bit and drill a pilot hole the rest of the way through the head for the main head screw.



35 Put some Titebond III on the head shelf and attach the head, running the self-tapping 3 1/2" stainless screw through the pilot hole you drilled through the head. Run it snugly into the body.



36 Place some glue into the top of the screw hole and plug the hole with a tapered wooden plug. Trim the plug to match the shape of the head and sand the plug smooth.



37 Using your knife, carve in a nice neck transition from the head into the body. Instead of sandpaper, Jerry uses a scrape at this point to knock off all of the rough spots. He leaves most of the tool marks on the body.

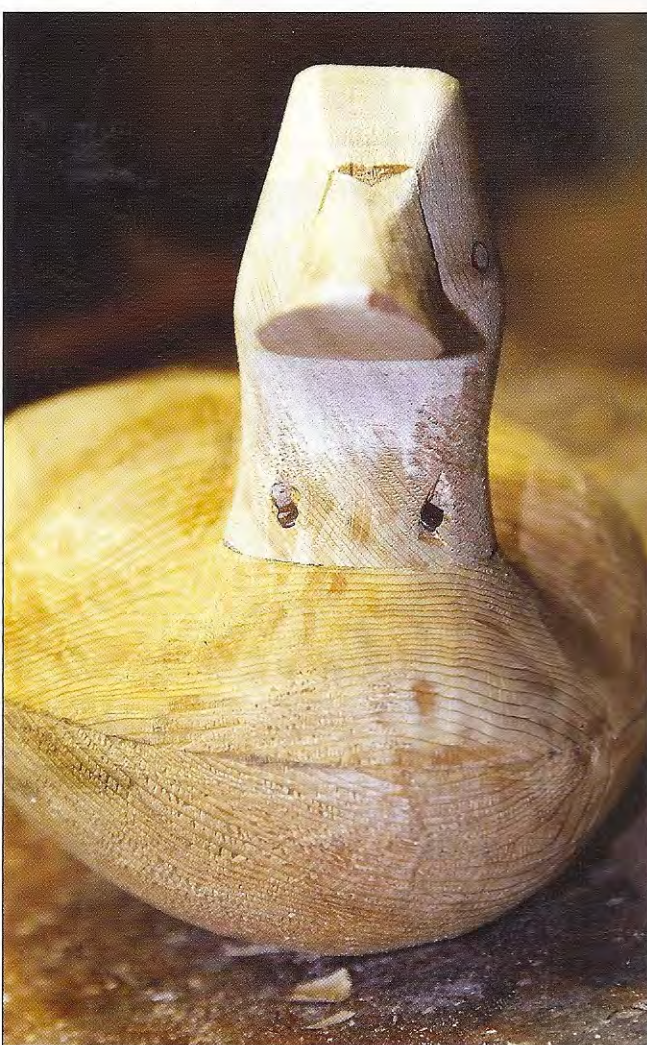


38 At the front of the head, draw in two lines straight down from the edges of the bill. Mark points where you will drill pilot holes angled slightly back into the body.



39 With the $\frac{1}{8}$ " bit, drill your pilot holes through the neck and on into the body about $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep. Place a rusty tack nail into each hole and using a punch, tap in the nails and countersink them a bit.

40 Your bird is now ready to finish and antique.

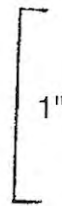


Wildfowl Carving

EXCLUSIVE PATTERN

Ruddy (Life-size)

By Jerry Talton © 2013



Head cut from 1.5" stock