

TIP 23 — “Old Man” Tommy bars/John Ecker, Tracy Atkinson and Tom Bank



John Ecker of West Bend, WI explains that at age 79, his fingers are slippery smooth, especially when steel parts are oily. He had trouble tightening up his 3-jaw chuck with the Tommy bars without his fingers slipping off. He solved the problem by turning up some easy-to-grip knurled brass sleeves that are pressed onto the end of the 5/32" diameter Tommy bars. The new brass handle is about 1.75" long and is pressed on leaving about 2" of Tommy bar remaining for a total length of about 3.75". If the press fit isn't tight enough, some Lock-tite® can be used to keep them in place. If you are looking for a test job for your new knurling tool, why not make something that you will use hundreds of times in your own shop?



If you don't have a knurling attachment, you can simply turn grooves in the end for grip as Larry Simon did on these brass ends, which are pressed onto standard Sherline Tommy bars.

An alternate method from Tracy Atkinson...

If you don't want to deal with custom building your handle, here's another way to add a little length and some grip to your Tommy bars. Stock knob handles are available in most hardware stores. Buy the smallest you can find. Tracy Atkinson sent in this photo and suggestion. He used super-glue to hold the knob in place.



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A fuel line handle idea from Tom Bank...

“Here's my solution, just a little different. I bought a foot of 1/8" fuel line from the auto supply store, cut it into 1-1/2" lengths, chucked my tommy bars into my bench mount drill press, and pressed the bars into the lengths of rubber fuel line. The rubber handles are about 1/4" in diameter and have a slight "give" that makes them a lot more comfortable to use when tightening chucks, etc. It's a project that is quick, easy, cheap, and helpful. They just don't look quite as fancy as the nice knurled brass handles that John Ecker made.”

—Tom Bank

A really cheap Tommy bar...

The least expensive Tommy bar I've seen is a large nail with the point ground off. The head of the nail probably isn't the most comfortable handle in the world, but it does give you some grip. The late Clyde Hackler of Plastools used these in his Sherline lathe when demonstrating his cutters at shows. It's not fancy, but it works. If you lose your Tommy bar on the bench some time, it might be quicker to find a nail to use until you locate the bar among the chips.—Craig Libuse