

TIP 62 — Perfect Spacing, Alignment and Arcs for Stamped Letters/Jerry Kieffer

Occasionally I have a need to stamp a smaller project with numbers and words in a professional looking manner. While there are special presses and stamps made for this type work, they are very expensive and generally limited to straight lines. In the past I have also hired this work done, but it was also expensive, time consuming and with mixed results. Of course attempts have been made to free hand stamp with readily available hand stamps. I doubt I have to explain the results of free hand stamping in regard to straight lines and even letter/number spacing to anyone who has tried.

In case anyone also has this need, I thought I would pass along a method I use that for the most part covers my needs. Rather than purchase expensive presses designed for this work, I use a Sherline Mill as follows.



Here is an example of the professional look you can get with stamped numbers. The upper sample was done in a straight line with the work piece held in a vise. For the round version with the letters on a curve, the work piece was held in a rotary table. Getting an even depth requires a consistent touch with the hammer.

First, the work piece to be stamped is mounted in the mill vise, the bed, a rotary table or however.

Second, a four-jaw, self-centering chuck is mounted on the mill spindle. A square stamp is then mounted in the chuck finger tight.

Third, the spindle is then rotated until the stamp is square to the slide movements and the spindle is locked in place. In the beginning, I used a wood wedge under the spindle pulley to lock it in place so it wouldn't turn. Since I use a locked spindle for several other purposes, I drilled two holes in the pulley and threaded for a locking screw.



Jerry's spindle lock and rod for tapping stamp held in 4-jaw chuck

Fourth, a 6.500"x 13/32" rod is inserted in the spindle bore so that the stamp in the chuck can be tapped from the top side of the spindle

Fifth, once the first letter or number has been stamped, the slides can be moved for correct spacing of the next figure to be stamped. The use of the slides will assure straight lines, and handwheel settings will assure proper spacing. With the work piece mounted on a rotary table, proper arcs and spacing are also possible.

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A part held in the vise is being stamped with a series of letters or numbers. Using the numbers on the X-axis handwheel to move the vise left/right assures even letter or number spacing. The square shank of the punch is located finger tight in the 4-jaw self-centering chuck. The photo above this one shows the steel rod used to tap the punch once it is in position.

Once stamping is complete, the stampings can be surface sanded to change number/letter appearance if desired. In the example photo the straight line was heavily sanded on the left side and lightly sanded on the right. The ark was not sanded. Stampings can also be lightly bead blasted for even another appearance variation not shown. For Sherline size projects, figures are normally limited to 3/32" or smaller.

One caution, hand stamps made in China and India DO NOT work well with this procedure, If they are even hard enough to stamp at all. The figures are not all the same size nor are they generally centered in the stamp. When stamped in a straight line or ark this stands out like a sore thumb.

—Jerry Kieffer

NOTE: Jerry also notes that most of the letters and numbers are approximately the same width for spacing purposes. Certain letters like “W” may be slightly wider. If the letter “I” or the number “1” do not have serifs on top and bottom spacing may need to be reduced in their case.