

By Bill Hunt  
THE INTELLIGENCER

Tom Henry has combined his love of horses and wood relief carving to produce some spectacular pieces of art.

Four of those pieces were on display at the Quinte Exhibition this past weekend.

Henry, 65, of Carrying Place, began carving as a child after receiving a knife for a Christmas present. For years Henry carved wooden whistles, gunstocks and even a wooden nickel, but he didn't take up the craft seriously until about 1987.

"I come from a horse family," he said Saturday while sitting in the Special Horse Breed Exhibit building at the fairgrounds. "My parents had horses and my brothers had horses," said Henry. His daughter and her husband have owned horses off and on and it was his daughter that got him carving on a serious level when she asked for a wooden door to be carved with a horse and jockey on it. That won him Best First Year Carver Relief at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1987. He also won second place at the exhibition for another carving. Unfortunately, a disagreement between exhibition officials and the Ontario Wood Carvers Association led to the dropping of the carving exhibit from the Canadian National Exhibition in 1988 or '89. That frustrated Henry because there is no other way for a wood carver to prove his worth.

"That was an international event and I remember (carvers) coming from Europe, Australia, England and Africa."

He prefers relief carving over round carving because of the intricacies involved in creating a sense of depth on a piece of wood that is no more than three inches deep.

"(With) relief carving you think it's deeper than it looks, so it creates an illusion," he said. "Carving relief has a lot more subject matter than a round carving and it is by far the hardest carving to do ... It's harder in

every aspect."

He's had some training in the fine arts but nothing formal in carving.

His penchant is for "action" scenes, and he like relief over round carving because the former can tell a story. For example, one carving called Go For Broke, shows a jockey walking a horse off the track with a damaged buggy in tow. It is obvious there was an accident, said Henry, but the jockey is smiling. "They're okay. They walked away from it."

The preferred wood for Henry is butternut, but he also carves in walnut, black cherry and cedar. The subject often dictates what kind of wood he'll use.

Most of Henry's work is commissioned by women who want to buy something for their husband or boyfriend. Only about one in 10 of

Because it takes between two to four months to complete a piece of work, Henry only does two to four a year.

Prices for his work vary and are not always what one might expect.

"Even though something is simple, it may bring the same amount of money as something that is highly detailed" because of its art quality.

The largest carving on display at the fair this year is called Dan Patch and is named after the famous horse that was the first to run a mile in one minute and 55 seconds, in 1906. The record stood for about 37 years, said Henry.

"He was a terribly famous horse. He had engines and watches and all sorts of items of the day named after him ... When the horse died, the owner died the next day."

his sales are to men.

Due to the price of his art, most people want commissioned works because they can choose the subject. In most cases they give Henry a photograph and he works from that, creating an outline of the subject on wood before he starts taking off the layers. A router is used for the open areas and then Henry uses a chisel for the subject.

"A router has less torment to the fibre in the wood and there's less chance of the wood fatiguing."

Before starting to take out the wood Henry has a pretty good idea in his mind of what the finished product will resemble. Only the details will change.

The challenge is to make a three-dimensional image that looks like it is a four-dimensional image.