

Gunleather: Decoration

Edge-Rolled Tooling and Basket-Weave Stamping

by Will Ghormley



I've got to say what a great time I had at the Convention. To see all of you again made February worth living through. Herb Gindulis, of Great Plains Hat Co. fame and I had just returned from a week in dusty Arizona. (I don't want to seem indelicate Herb, but have you been able to dislodge that tumbleweed yet?!) Boy was it good to be back home among friends! Not that Arizona was all bad. I got to see some of the old crew I shot with in southwest Colorado. I also met some folks I've only heard about.

I had the pleasure of running into Johnnie Roper of Buckeye, Arizona. You've probably read some of his letters in *The Shootist*. What a character! We must have stood and chatted for over an hour and a half! He told me to say "hey" to George, which I did at the Convention. He hopes to make it up for Nationals this year. I hope he makes it, it would be a hoot! If you saw him you would know him right away. He describes himself as, "... quite a large mustache followed shortly by a rather small man."

I should be getting down to business though. Last edition I promised I would talk about edge rolled tooling and basket weave stamping.

The edge roller is a handle with interchangeable wheels of different patterns (Plate 1).

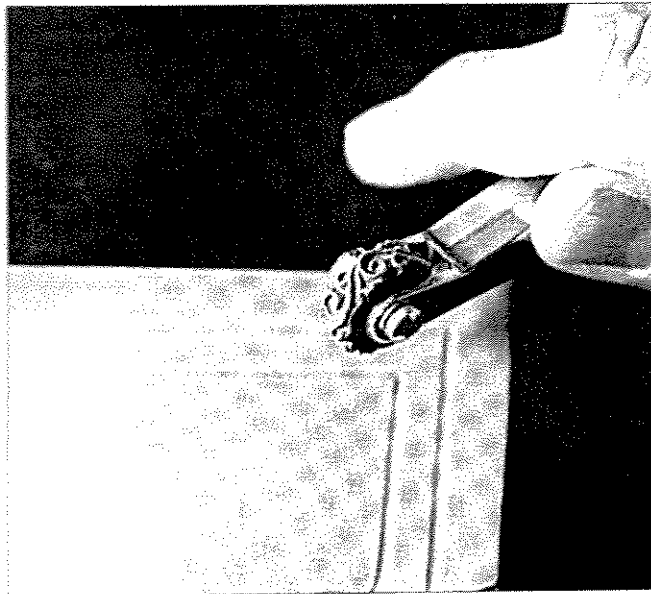


Plate 1

Much of the decoration on holsters of the Old West were done with hand held rollers like this, or in larger shops, with mechanical rollers. As you can see in the picture, I've made two parallel lines on the damp leather with the dull end of my adjustable gouge. They are wide enough apart to allow me to roll the pattern between them. You have to hold the tool almost straight up and down to put enough pressure on the roller to leave a good imprint (Plate 2).

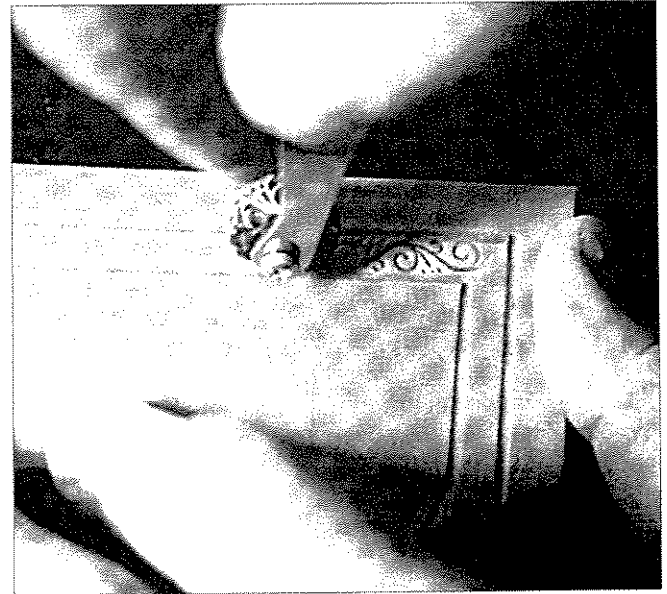


Plate 2

In the corner, where the rolled patterns meet, I used a seeder stamp of appropriate size to cover their junction (Plates 3 & 4).

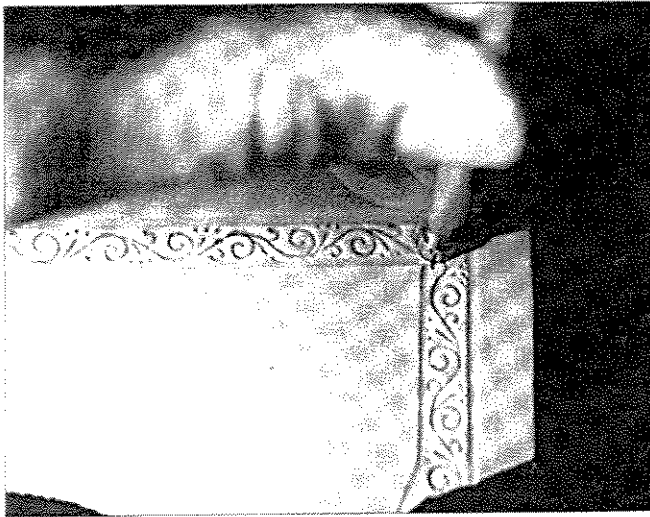


Plate 3

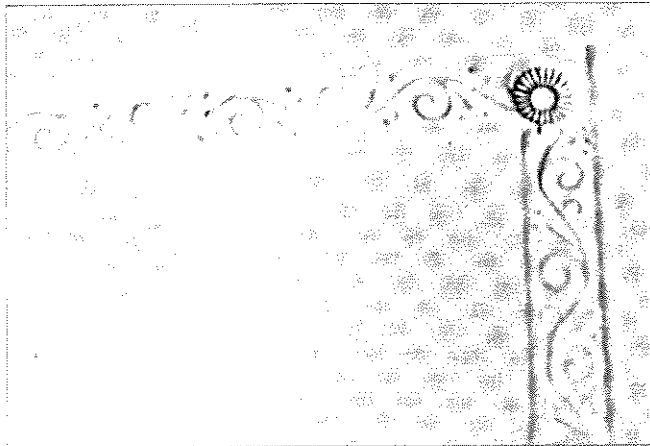


Plate 4

In Plate 5 I have put my parallel lines closer together, run the edge roller on both sides of the line, and finished the corners with a star, for a different look.

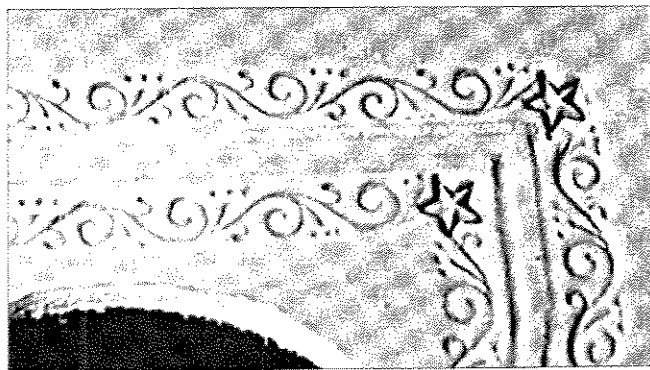


Plate 5

Using rolled patterns, whether by machine or hand, has always been wide spread. It would be hard to date edge rolling because of it's different uses, but examples of this style of embossing pre-date the Civil War - and continue to this day.

The Mexican basket weave stamp is a little easier to date, however. Not much of it was seen before the mid 1880s, and it didn't become wide spread in the United States until after the turn of the century. If you are doing a late 1800s impression, you would be on the cutting edge with a basket weave stamped rig.

Factory basket weaving is often done on hydraulic rollers, or in a press, but for someone doing a one-of-a-kind, the only way to do it is one stamp at a time. It can get tedious.

To begin, you must outline the area you are going to stamp. Use the edge gouge on the damp leather to set up the border for the pattern from the edge of your holster or belt. Next, scribe a line at a diagonal across the area you'll be stamping (Plate 6).

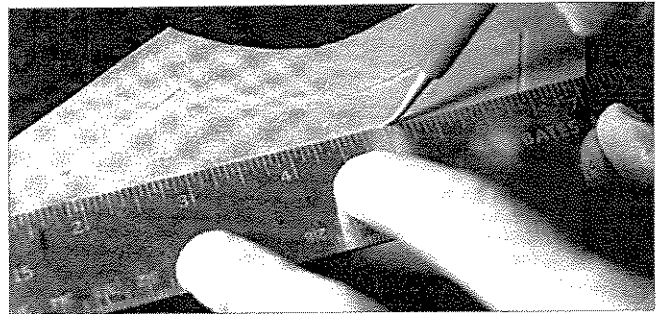


Plate 6

Don't try to basket weave parallel to any of your border lines. It is difficult to keep the lines of the basket weave stamp parallel over a large area. If you start it parallel to any other line of the rig, it will really show up if you get out of kilter. If you work on a diagonal that doesn't line up with anything, it will be harder to see if you get a little off. If you get enough off, nothing will help (the voice of experience).

Line your basket weave stamp up along the diagonal line. After you have made an impression, line the other edge of the stamp up with the diagonal line. The stamp impressions will alternate from side to side of the diagonal line. Nestle the end of the stamp up against the vertical impression in the previous stamp (Plate 7).

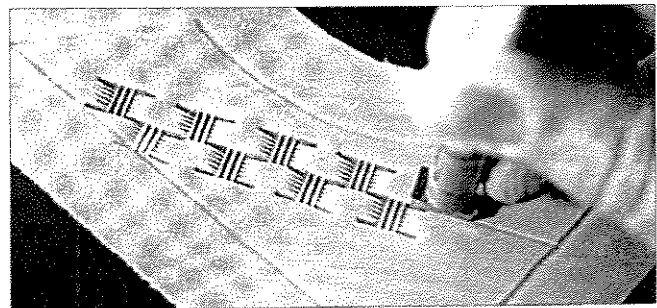


Plate 7

The goal is to not only keep the diagonal lines of the stamp parallel to each other, but to keep the vertical lines of the stamp lined up with one another. It takes some practice. You might want to try it out on a scrap before you stamp your project.

From time to time you might need to lay a straight edge across your pattern and scribe a new straight line to follow. Don't wait until your lines are real crooked before you try to straighten them out. It would be better to scribe a new line every time than try to fix basket stamping that has swerved out of control.

When you are on the last stamp of each row, and the impression of the stamp is going to cross your border lines, rock the stamp so you leave only a partial impression when struck with the mallet. You may leave some faint impressions outside of the lines. If you look closely at Plate 8, you can see where I've gone over on some of my stamps.

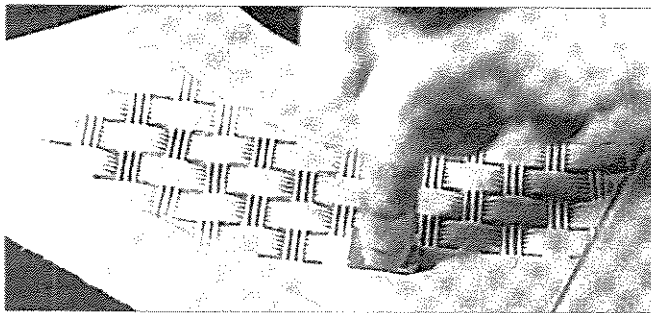


Plate 8

When you've finished your basket weave pattern it's time to put in the border stamp. This covers up the partial basket weave imprints along the edge of the pattern. There are border tools just for this purpose, but camouflage stamps work fine too. In Plate 9, I've chosen a medium sized camouflage stamp to finish out the inside of the border.

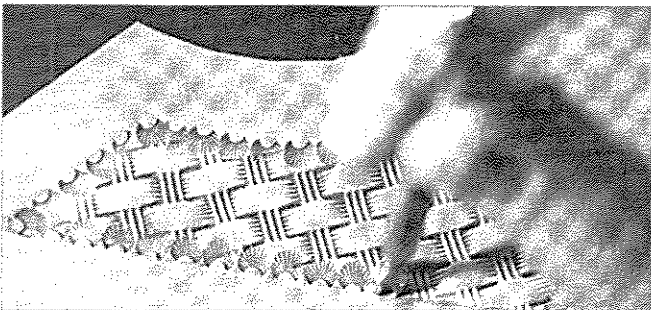


Plate 9

When I finished the inside of the border I didn't like the look. I took my adjustable edge gouge and scribed a new line around the border (Plate 10).

Looks good enough to me, I think I'll leave it alone. If you wanted to, though, you could edge roll around the whole pattern.

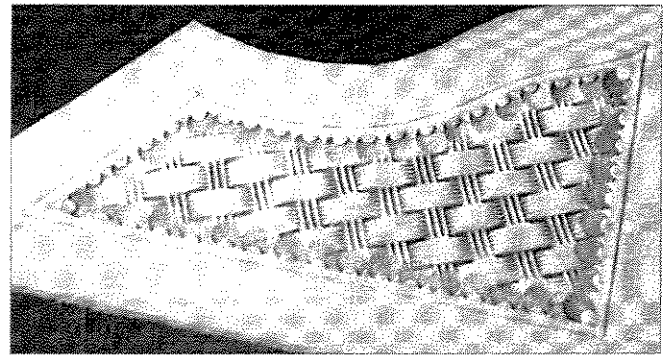


Plate 10

That pretty much covers decorations. I haven't got a clue as to what I'll write about next issue. If you have any ideas, give me a ring or drop me a line and let me know what you want to see.

Until next time, see you on the range. Will.



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