

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 3
\$3.50

SMALL PRESS

JANUARY/
FEBRUARY
1985

The Magazine of Independent Publishing



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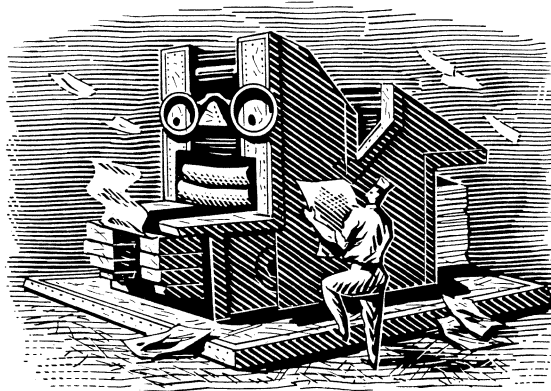
Kitchen Table: For Third World Women

Caring for Your Vandercook / Bryan R. Johnson

ONE OF THE most popular kinds of letterpress presses is the Vandercook. Vandercooks are actually proof presses, manufactured to assist in a single step of production, not to bear the brunt of printing long runs. The design reflects this purpose for, although most of the models have power inking, the paper is usually hand-fed and the presses are hand-operated. Despite these limitations, Vandercooks are still very popular for small runs or for pulling repro proofs. Although they are still manufactured and can be purchased new, used Vandercooks can be easily found at prices 90 percent lower than those for new presses.

Although several models of Vandercook presses are in general use, including the model 4, Universal 1, Universal 2, and the SP15, for the purpose of this article they are all described as "a Vandercook." (Moreover, many of the points I make here apply to all printing presses.)

Cleanliness: Printing presses need to be kept clean in order to operate properly. Since printing involves precise spacing of parts—to within a thousandth of an inch—the presence of dirt, dust, dried or built-up ink, or stray shreds of paper can throw the machinery off balance. In addition, dirt or grease that comes in contact with paper can spoil a sheet or even an entire run. Getting a press clean is harder than keeping a press clean, a fact to keep in mind when buying a used press that has not been properly maintained. However, the other extreme—a press that has been



completely cleaned with steam—should be avoided at all costs; it may be sparkling and beautiful, but the steam strips away all vestiges of protective oil and injects water into internal components, promoting a very serious rust problem in the future.

A number of grease solvents are on the market, the most appropriate being those without detergents. It is preferable to apply grease cleaners in moderation, even if it means you have to repeat the process a number of times. Flooding gears or bearings will not remove caked-on ink any faster, and may result in the solvent working its way into areas where it may cause future harm. When you work on areas with built-up ink, you can try softening the ink first with the solvent and then scrubbing off the ink by hand. However, I recommend that you *don't* use a sharp scraper or a wire brush when you clean the cylinder or form-roller racks, the vibrator worm (the gear on the shaft of the top inking roller that causes the roller to shift back and forth, distributing the ink evenly), the bearings, or any other parts that move or are moved upon. Such rough treatment will cause wear and will throw off the impression. For particularly troublesome or hard-to-reach areas, aerosol solvents are quite effective.

On a Vandercook, the areas you should watch out for are:

—cylinder racks; dirt or grit will wear the gears, causing the cylinder to slip, resulting in bad impressions and registration.

—the bed; even a small amount of built-up ink or dirt will raise the height of the type in that area, causing an uneven impression.

—the vibrator worm; ink, dirt, or grit will cause wear.

—the housing around the drive chain where it meets the

ink-drum sprocket, the sprocket itself, and the point at which the ink-drum rod meets the body of the press; these are particularly troublesome because, during cleanup, ink runs down into these areas. A build-up of ink can slow down the drum or, in extreme cases, catch the drive chain, overworking the motor.

Lubrication: Moving parts on all machines need to be lubricated to reduce friction and wear. On a Vandercook, there are two types of oiling jobs: keeping the oil wells filled and regularly oiling exposed parts. The oil wells are located where bearing housings prevent direct access to the moving parts. You should check these regularly (once a week is not too often) and keep them filled with S.A.E. 20 motor oil, using a brass needle-spout oil can. Exposed areas to be oiled include any surfaces that turn, roll, or rub against other parts (cams, rods, gears, and racks). Keep in mind, however, that oily surfaces that are exposed to the air collect dust and dirt; you should wipe them off with an oily rag and, if needed, use a light machine oil (e.g., 3-in-1) for extra lubrication. Two exceptions to this rule are the vibrator worm gear and the gripper shanks on the impression cylinder—you should use petroleum jelly to lubricate them. In the case of the vibrator worm gear, this thick lubricant is necessary because, being suspended, the gear would allow light machine oil to drip off, exposing the upper side. The grippers are a special problem. Although they are moving

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parts, and therefore need lubrication, they are also the point at which the paper being printed upon touches the machinery. If you use machine oil to lubricate the gripper shanks, it can work its way up to the grippers, staining the edges of the paper.

Oiling should be done lightly but often to achieve the best results.

Adjustments: Vandercooks, like all machines, are individual in their character. They also change with conditions, use, and age. For all of their size and weight, they are capable of being adjusted to very fine degrees.

FOR EXAMPLE, on the Vandercook 4, the motor that drives the chain drive has only one speed. However, depending on the type of ink and the temperature and humidity, you may want to adjust the rate at which the inking drum rotates and the degree of force with which it meets the rollers. This can be done in a number of ways. First, the way *not* to do it is to remove a link from the drive

chain: This will shorten the length of the chain too much, placing too much tension on it (and possibly causing the belt to slip). A better way is to adjust the position of the motor, thereby affecting the amount of power delivered to the rollers. The motor on this model is mounted on a bracket, slung upside down. The bolts mounting the motor to the bracket pass through slots, allowing the motor to be shifted horizontally. This doesn't affect the amount of power, however, as the length (diameter) of the chain isn't changed. The motor can also be raised or lowered by adjusting the same bolts. This will change the amount of tension of the belt that delivers power from the motor to the chain drive, thereby speeding up or slowing down the speed of the ink drum.

These adjustments can only be learned by getting to know the press: where all the parts are, what they do, and how they work. By knowing how parts should work together, you can make them react in different ways to

meet very specific requirements.

Replacement of parts: Overall, Vandercooks are tough and long-wearing. However, some parts are more delicate than others or are subjected to greater wear, making them susceptible to failure. Anyone using a Vandercook will have to expect to replace some parts during the normal course of events. Needed parts are available from Vandersons Corporation, 2020 S. Carboy Road, Mount Prospect, IL 60056, makers of the Vandercook presses. Although some models are no longer made, the firm may still have parts available. If there is a part they do not have in stock, they will provide a drawing to allow you to have it made locally.

Another source of parts is a used-printing-machinery dealer: Often other Vandercook presses can be cannibalized for the appropriate part.

Major repair and overhaul: Although cleaning, oiling, minor adjustments, and replacement of small parts are easily done by an operator who is

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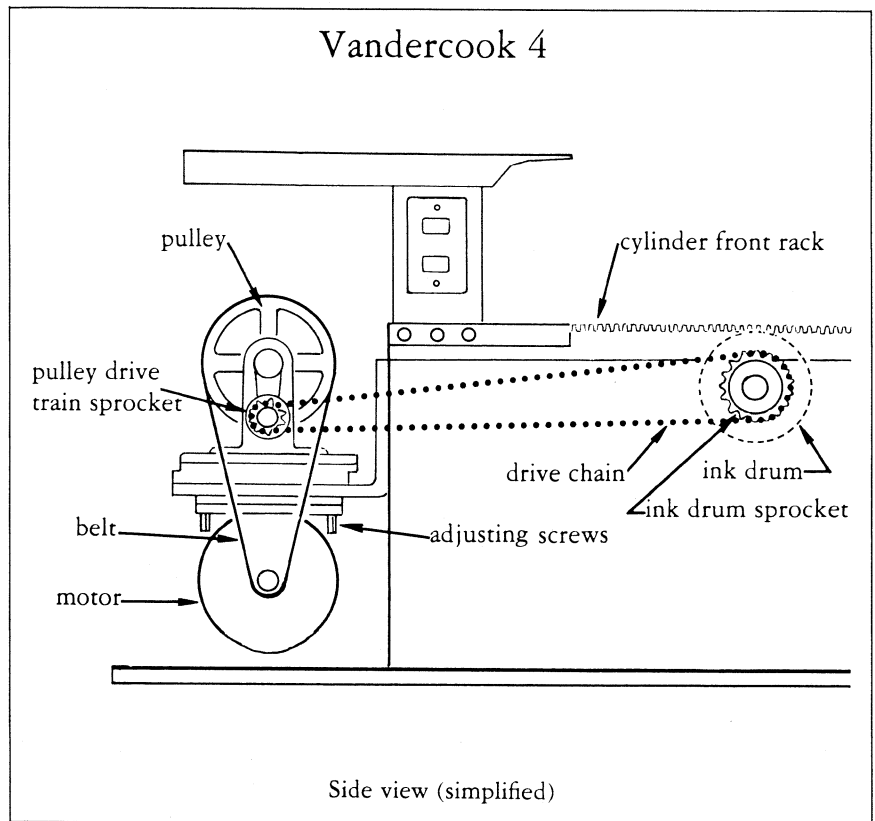
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familiar with the press, larger jobs involve a greater ability than most press operators have. For these jobs, it is better for you to let a professional press repairman take over. Vander- sons will give you the name and number of the repairman nearest you. These repairmen can service Vandercooks all over the United States, charging for their work by the hour plus travel expenses. By using a professional, you can avoid making a problem worse; the workings of the press are intricate enough that the repairs which involve disassembly need an experienced hand.

By learning how the press works, you can not only learn how to maintain it and perform small repairs, but also learn how to get the most out of it for printing. A careful study of the press's workings, use of the press for a variety of jobs, and a copy of the manual (available from Vander- sons for five dollars plus postage), will enable you to keep your press in running order for many years to come. □



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