

The Silver Sceptre

The rising wand has been around for more than a couple of centuries. But master-originator George Blake modified the rising wand's working, and he developed a wonderful routine for it, which delights both children and adults. George Blake named his wand and routine The Silver Sceptre. The now well-known Silver Sceptre is a great comedy opener, and many children's entertainers currently use the item at the beginning of their act.

Although a dealer item, I have included the workings of the Silver Sceptre here since it is now virtually in the public domain as a gag wand. The Sceptre is basically a length of aluminium tubing with a ball at each end. A length of elastic runs through the length of tubing, with each end attached to a ball, see **Fig 4.2**.

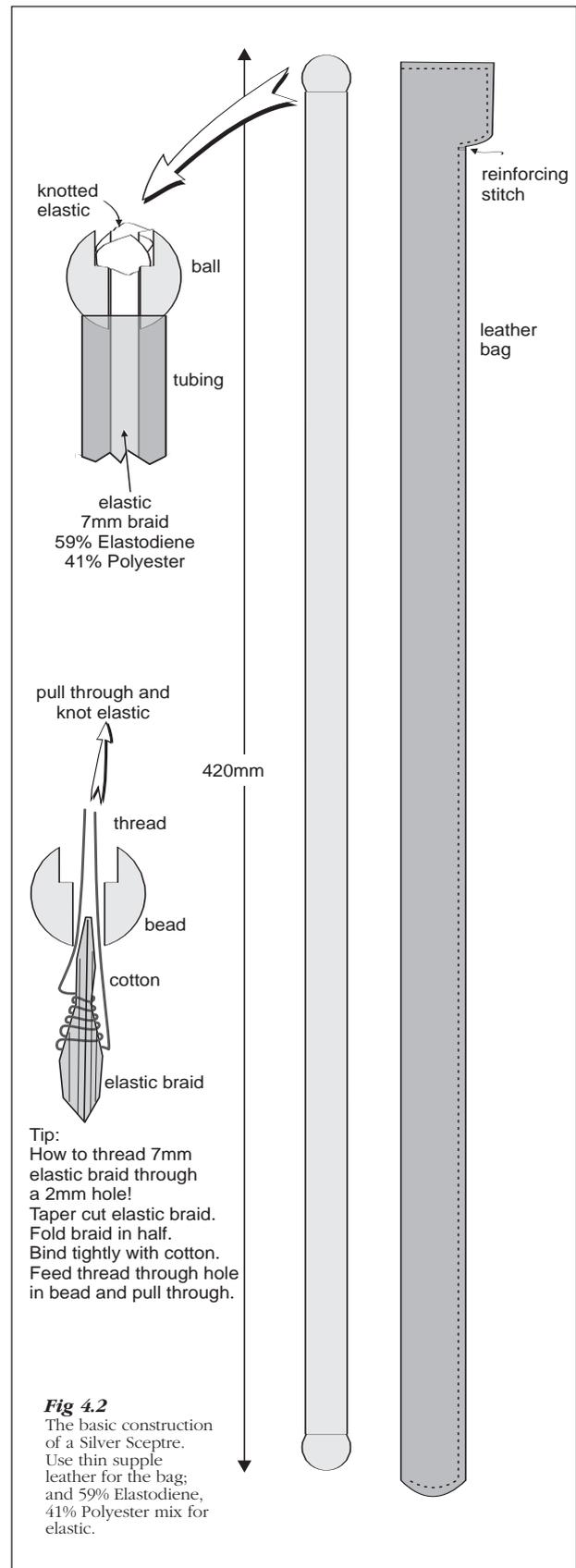
Unfortunately, some of the current rising wands sold under the name of Silver Sceptre are manufactured as cheaply as possible. Consequently, the quality suffers and the wands are nowhere near as good as George Blake's original. For a start, the bag that comes with it is made from cheap, thin plastic. The plastic bag not only impedes the smooth rise of the wand but doesn't last very long before the end splits apart. So, the first thing to do is replace the bag with one made from thin supple leather. There is no need for the snap popper, as it is never used.

Secondly, the inferior models are supplied with low-grade elastic. Again, this not only hinders the smooth rise of the wand but the elastic will easily break (which will no doubt happen during an important show in front of hundreds of people). So, use elastic which is flat braid 6mm wide. The elastic to polyester ratio comes in all sorts.

The optimum combination for strength and elasticity is around 59% Elastodiene, 41% Polyester. This will give a generous stretch of approximately 3:1. The length of the elastic (in its non-stretched state) should be about 20 mm shorter than the length of the tubing. This will ensure that the ball on either end snaps back to the tubing, yet allows full stretch of the wand's length.

After threading the elastic, tie a single knot and pull it completely into the well of the ball. Cut off the surplus elastic and finish it with a dab of white rubber cement to prevent it from unravelling.

In recent years, dealers made the end balls of smaller diameter so that the wand looked of uniform thickness throughout its length. But this so-called 'improvement' actually obstructs the operator's



smooth handling when grabbing the ball tip. If you are going to make a Silver Sceptre yourself then ensure the diameter of the end tips are much larger than the diameter of the wand.

The routine is quite well known, and 100s of children's entertainers have introduced their pet moves with the wand and its bag. The only additional item required is a lady's Nylon headscarf, which is approximately 600mm square.

The UK's leading funny magic man, Terry Herbert, presents a routine that is second-to-none on his DVDs, and includes his marvellously funny patter. Most kids' entertainers who perform Silver Sceptre use a version of Terry's routine and patter; and that includes me! I implore you to get his DVDs to see the master at work and learn from it.

In essence, the wand appears to have a mind of its own. It rises despite being pushed down by the performer. It pops up the performer's nose, into his ear and even rises again when it is put back into the bag. All this, of course, happens when the magician doesn't see it but the kiddies do... and they tell the magic man about the naughty wand in no uncertain terms.

Here are a few pointers to note about getting the best out of this amazing prop. These observations will be obvious to some but may be overlooked by others:

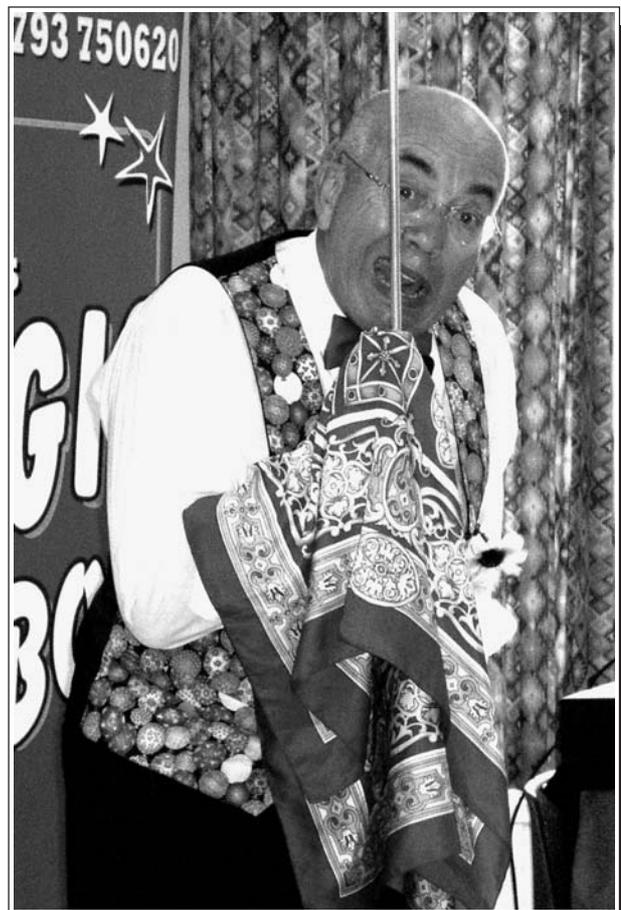
- i) Talk about the Sceptre as something that is 'living', (not an inanimate object), for example, "He's very naughty." "Now we've got him." "You little rascal," etc.
- ii) Regularly video your double-takes when you do see the wand in its elevated state. It is so easy to lose the timing of a double-take when you perform the same effect several times a day. You are not supposed to react to the wand's movements without first 'seeing' it; **Fig 4.3**. I've seen so many performers act in response 'before' they have turned around to see the wand getting up to its mischief. One way is funny, the other is not!
- iii) Polishing the wand at the beginning of the routine actually helps the wand to glide smoothly through both the headscarf and the leather bag. Use a see-through scarf if possible as there is little possibility of them seeing the elastic, and it all adds to the mystery.
- iv) I have discovered a simple technique to cause the wand to appear to shoot up your nose

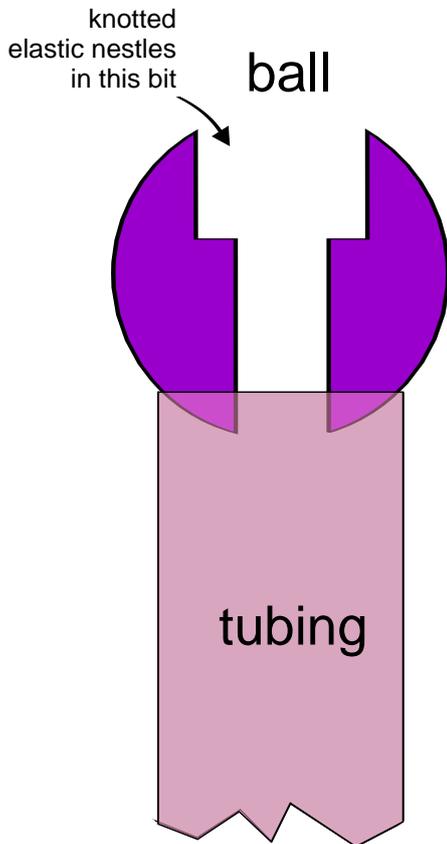
without any fear of personal injury! You simply bend forward so that your nose is virtually over the wand's tip. Slowly let the wand rise until it locates the tip of your nose. Then suddenly straighten up as you fully release the wand so that it keeps contact with the tip of your nose. The wand appears to shoot up into your nose. Ouch! The children love it!

- v) Buff the ends of the aluminum tubing so that it is smooth. This prevents the elastic from ever wearing out as it is constantly stretched over the tube's edges.
- vi) Get your leather maker to put a couple of extra stitches around the part of the bag where the ball catches (see **Fig 4.2**).

Fig 4.3

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Notice that there are two different size holes drilled into the end balls.

The elastic is known as 'flat braid'. It comes in different widths. 6mm is ideal (about 1/4 inch).

Thread the elastic right the way through the ball. Tie a knot, and then pull the elastic back so that the knot jams in the larger hole in the ball. Trim excess elastic and dip with rubber cement to stop fraying.

Repeat this procedure at other end of tube; But first prepare the 'flat braid' elastic.

It will say on the packet that it's made from a percentage of pure elastic and a remaining percentage of polyester. The best combination for strength and smooth rise is when the polyester and elastic are about 50/50%. I've used some as way out as 39%/61% but that is the extreme.

If you use a flat braid of say, 20% elastic and 80% polyester, then it will be very strong and never break... but the rise of the wand will be jerky, and its smooth rise will not be under your direct control!

On the other hand if you use flat braid of say 80% elastic and only 20% polyester then the wand will rise smoothly BUT will wear out after about 200 performances.

Cutting the correct length. Prepare one end of elastic fixed to ball. Lay the braid elastic alongside the tube. Mark the tube's length on the braid. Now mark the braid 1 inch shorter. It's this mark where the 2nd knot will go (after threading the elastic through the tube of course).

Have fun!

John