

SAWMILL FORUM

BY CASEY CREAMER

When you hammer saws, you don't just pull the saw out of the crate, clean it up, and begin hammering on it. You have to inspect the saw to see what is out of spec and by how much. When the saw is finished it should be flat on the log side, with an acceptable amount of wobble, and the right amount of tension in the right location. So, after cleaning the saw, you check to see how much wobble it has and if it is flat on the log side or dished one way or the other. Then you check the tension to see how that looks. After that you start to formulate a strategic plan as to what you want to do first to correct whatever is wrong with the saw and to find the most efficient way of getting it back to flat on the log side, with an acceptable amount of wobble, and the right amount of tension in the right location.

But the process is more complicated than that. I believe that there is much more to my job than just putting the saw back into the proper condition. Yes, that is the main goal, but it doesn't stop there. When a saw comes into my shop, it comes in for a reason. That reason is that the sawyer thinks it isn't running properly. But at times there is a big unanswered (and sometimes unasked) question that comes along with every saw that comes into my shop or any other shop. This saw is not running properly: Why? Does it just need to be hammered properly? What made it stop running properly? Did the mill have some sort of accident? Did the log come undogged? Did the sawyer make a set while in the cut? Did the lug pins shear? Did a slab get wedged in alongside the blade and heat it severely? Was the saw being sharpened inaccurately? Do the collars need to be machined? Are the shanks worn out so it was spilling sawdust and heating the blade?

I approach each blade from a troubleshooting perspective, even if nobody at the mill has asked me to. Sometimes they will send me a blade as part of the troubleshooting process. They are trying to figure out why the mill won't run correctly and I have them send me the saw so I can see what it can tell me. Most of the time,

the mills just send me their saw/s without any comment at all. At this point I could just fix the saw and send it back without any comment at all, and I suspect there are a few sawyers out there who wish I would do just that.

But I think it is my duty to try to look for answers to any sawmill questions whether they were asked or not. My reasoning is that if a saw was sent to me because there is something else in the mill that is causing it to not perform properly, then no matter how well I hammer the saw, it still won't run properly until they are made aware of the problem and are able to fix it. And if the saw that I just hammered doesn't perform properly, no matter who is to blame, it doesn't do my business any good nor does it help the customer to be profitable so that I can keep doing business with them for many years to come.

Imagine that a saw comes in and, during the cleaning process, I notice extraneous metal at the collar line on the board side of the saw. That extraneous metal came from the fast (board side) collar. That metal has to be very carefully removed from the saw. When I say "carefully", that means that it is something you shouldn't do yourself. Leave it to the person who also has the need to examine that area of the saw with a straight edge. If I have to remove

collar metal from your saw, it is obvious to me that you sheared the pins and now your collars have to be remachined if you want the saw that I just hammered to run properly. At that moment, I feel the duty to inform someone at the mill that the collars have to be remachined. When the sawyer replaces the lug pins there is no doubt that he/she knows the pins had sheared, but I can't and won't assume that the sawyer also realizes that the collars now have to be remachined.

These saws have a lot to tell you if you look at them from an analytical perspective. Collar metal on a saw is obvious to anyone paying attention. But there are many more subtle things that the saw will tell you if you look closely enough. Just recently a saw came in with a very shiny guideline on the log side. When I see a shiny guideline, it tells me that the sawyer has been trying to steer the saw with the guides, which we all know is wrong. If you want to do it temporarily to keep producing until you get to the next break where you can correct the issue, that's okay, but doing it for a very short period of time won't show me the kind of shiny guideline evidence I am talking about here.

It's not uncommon to see a saw that has been steered with the guides. But it is more common to see the board side guide line shiny instead of the log side guide line. That is because it is more common for an improperly running saw to run out of the cut instead of into the cut. Therefore, the sawyer might try to hold it in with the board side guide. When I saw the wear on the log side guide line, I expected to see a saw that was dished towards the log side. It would make sense that if the saw was dished towards the log side it would be running in and the sawyer might try to prevent that by holding it out a little with the log side guide. But this saw was dished towards the board side. Why would the sawyer be trying to hold it out?

I came to the conclusion that the saw



was probably sawing a straight line, but it wasn't the line the sawyer wanted. Meaning rather than the saw running off line, there was an alignment issue at the mill. It might have been something as simple as misalignment of the headblocks. So, the saw cut okay, but because of the alignment issue the lumber measured wrong. The simple solution should have been to correct the alignment issue. Maybe the sawyer thought it was a saw issue instead of an alignment issue. So, he held the saw out a little to get his lumber to measure properly, and in that process, he managed to dish the saw towards the board side by pushing it that way with the guides. By the time the saw got to me it looked like a normal saw that was dished towards the board side and presumably running out of the log. But with the log side guide line looking shiny, it threw up a red flag that prompted me to inform the mill that they also have an alignment issue that has to be corrected if they want the saw that I just hammered to perform properly.

It's all about looking at the complete picture. "Don't ask, don't tell" is not part of the equation.

Interested to learn more from Casey Creamer? You can watch our video on how Casey hammers circular saws on The Northern Logger YouTube page. Just search for "The Northern Logger" on YouTube and click the video entitled "How to Hammer a Circular Saw with Casey Creamer." Please send future questions about sawmills and their operation to Casey Creamer, saw doctor and president of Seneca Saw Works, Inc., PO Box 681, Burdett, NY 14818, (607) 546-5887. You can also reach out by email: casey@senecasaw.com.

A note to our readers: Last month, we featured a photo of a saw doctor incorrectly identified as Casey Creamer. It was actually a photo of Charlie McMann, who runs The Saw Shop in New Hampshire.

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