

Mister Sawmill Model 30

BY DAVID BOYT

Mountain Home, Arkansas, is the home of Mister Sawmill, a company that builds a variety of manual band sawmills. With no hydraulics and only enough electrical power to keep the battery topped off for starting the engine, nearly all of the power from the engine goes into cutting the wood. This basic approach keeps down the price of the mill, and simplifies maintenance.



Just 20 miles away, Floyd Killian of Gainesville, Missouri, has a home site that many of us dream of. Surrounded by Ozark hardwoods, he has a ready source of oak, hickory, and even some walnut. “This area has been selective cut several times, but never been clearcut,” he told me. “I was born about three miles from here. My grandfather homesteaded here. I still have a lot of relatives around these parts.” Floyd has planted several wildlife feed plots on his property, including a deer feeder that he and his wife can watch from the back porch. “The other day, there was a doe and a fawn at the deer feeder. They left, but about 45 minutes later, there were four of them out there.”

Three years ago, Floyd decided that he wanted to not only build his own home in the country, he wanted to build it out of lumber he had cut himself. “The only place I had ever seen a band mill before buying this one was at the Springfield, Missouri, farm show,” he explained. He had looked at several portable band

mills, and was surprised to find that there was one manufactured so close by. “They brought one over for me to look at. I decided that this was a good mill for the money, plus it was built locally, and I like to support the local economy.”

Although he had extensive experience as a marine mechanic, Floyd acknowledges that he is a novice sawyer. “I brought it up here, and had never sawn a board before, but just started cutting. I’m still learning, but I can make lumber. We started framing a little over a year ago, working strictly weekends,” he said. Floyd buys all his logs from local loggers and keeps an eye out for areas that are being cleared. On the day of my visit, he was cutting eastern red cedar for siding. He had a 24-inch-diameter by 8-foot log on the deck. “My neighbor was just going to doze and burn these trees,” he told me. “I probably paid for the dozer work when I bought these logs from him.”

The mill frame itself is built on a 6-inch I-beam with a 1-inch-square tubing track. A V-twin Honda engine

Making the cut. Floyd finds the sawmill easy to push through the log, but has thought about setting up an electric winch feed to save walking.

provides the power. “That 24-horse is just perfect. I don’t think you could kill the engine,” says Floyd. The engine drives a 5/8-inch-wide V belt, which turns a 19-inch-diameter band wheel. The band wheel has a V-groove that takes a tight-fitting belt for the blade bearing surface. The maximum throat opening is 30 inches, maximum blade height is 30 inches, and the standard track length allows cutting an 18-foot log, though extensions are available. With no hydraulic lines, and no feed cable, the main issue with adding extensions would be to keep them straight and level.

The blade tensioning system on the mill uses three nuts. These pull the idler band wheel back in a straight line, and balance the forces on the bearing, as well as adjust the blade tracking. According to Joe Pence, one of the owners of Mister Sawmill, the system is manufactured

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Log clamps are a pair of adjustable cams on handles. Note the two large nuts on the side of the mill for adjusting blade tension and tracking.

to have the correct tension and tracking when one nut is finger tight, then turned another 360 degrees with a wrench. The other two nuts are locking nuts and should not normally need adjusting. Floyd, however, has his own system. “I put on the blades without releasing the tension. I just roll them right onto the wheel.” Floyd also leaves the tension on the blade when the mill is not in use—a practice discouraged by many manufacturers, because it can put a set into the blade.

The blade height indicator is a straight scale on the side of the carriage. “It works pretty well, but I still have some trouble telling exactly where I want it,” says Floyd. The blade lube system drips onto both sides of the blade with an upper drip above the idler band wheel, and lower drip below it. Mister Sawmill recommends a blade lube of 50% diesel fuel and 50% chain saw oil. Floyd says that this works well, but he often cuts without the lube.

The log clamping system also uses a simple approach. The stops adjust vertically. The two clamps slide in and out manually, and have a cam and handle to tighten them against the log. This is a system common to many manual mills and while it is effective, it is sometimes difficult to hold a log with the cant hook with one hand while clamping it down with the other. Like many (if not most) sawmills, one of the log stops

had a nick out of it where he had hit it with the blade. “I was really tired when I did that,” he explained. “There’s absolutely no question that it’ll ruin a blade.”

The saw guide rollers are sealed bearings with a pair of bearings above the blade and one bearing behind it. The bottom support is a brass plate. These are adjustable, but Floyd has not needed to adjust them since he bought the mill. The adjustable guide slides in and out by pushing or pulling a handle connected to it. After three years of use and exposure to the elements, this adjustment was a bit stiff. A wire brush and some grease would, no doubt, put it back into smooth operation.

One problem Floyd has had is that the carriage wheels tend to wear through. He has had to replace two of them, so far. “Until that wheel cuts through, it is fairly easy



Floyd’s “hydraulic log turner” is his backhoe loader. He only uses it on logs that are too heavy to turn with a cant hook.



Adjusting the blade height. As with most manual mills, Mister Sawmill uses a crank to adjust the height. A ratchet holds it in place.

to push the mill through the log,” he said. “I wound up cutting quite a bit of lumber, and I was really working to push it through. I had a hard time identifying that particular problem.” The good news is that like many of the mill parts, replacements are locally available, which keeps the downtime and expense to a minimum.

Time to Saw Lumber

With a turn of the key, the Honda engine came to life. With no power assist to set the height of the cut, Floyd hand-cranked the ratcheting height adjustment for the first cut. The 10:1 gear box is smooth, and holds the carriage height securely. There is a ratchet release for lowering the blade, but the weight of the carriage will make it drop quickly unless the sawyer has a good grip on the crank.

After pulling the lever to engage the clutch, Floyd pushed the mill through the first slabbing cut on the cedar log. Besides simplicity, the manual mill provides the sawyer with immediate feedback on the feed pressure. With experience, one learns when to ease off when sawing through a knot, for example. Since the sawyer walks alongside the blade, it makes it easy to watch for defects that indicate it is time to turn the log if sawing for grade. Pushing the mill by hand also lets you know in no uncertain terms

Mister Sawmill Model 30

Frame construction	6 in. x 2 in. x 8.2 lbs./ft. channel
Track	1-in.-sq. tube welded to frame
Carriage construction	2-in.-sq. tube, 3 in. x 4 in. angle, misc. plate
Motor	24-hp Honda GX-670 twin-cylinder electric-start engine standard. Also uses 10-hp, 220-vac electric motor if ordered. Most similar engines will fit.
Bunk	6 in. x 2 in. x 8.2 lb. channel on 42 in. centers
Saw blades	13 ft. 5 in. x 1.25 in. x 7/8 in. pitch standard
Band wheel diameter	19 in.
Maximum log length	18 ft. standard (plus 8–10 in. of extra length) but can be made to any length
Maximum log diameter	36 in. gross, 30 in. between the blade guides
Weight	1,400 lbs.
Price	\$8,395 complete with trailer package, all up and running
Options	Log-loading ramps, log-loading winch, loading-ramp T posts for making them into a dog deck

MANUFACTURER

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MANUFACTURER'S STATEMENT

Mister Sawmill has been manufacturing band mills for about six years. We concentrate our efforts on the manual mill market, specializing in high-quality machines that are inexpensive to operate and maintain, while lasting for years in adverse conditions. Our designs use universally available parts to keep costs down and maintenance to a minimum, which has resulted in an extremely low percentage of warranty problems. The Model 30 is our largest mill.

when it is time to change the blade. In spite of these benefits, Floyd has found it to be more of a workout than he really wants. “One thing I have thought about is putting a reversible winch on the carriage. That would take some of the work off.”

After a couple more cuts, it was time to turn the log. Since Floyd operates the mill without help, he uses a hydraulic log turner—his backhoe. Anytime he needs to turn a big log, he wraps a chain around it and uses the loader to turn it. Although awkward and time-consuming, it does work. He reserves this technique for those few logs that he cannot turn with a cant hook.

It took a little over an hour to saw the cedar log into 1-inch-thick boards. “I paid \$40 for this log,” he told me. “Compared to retail prices, this is maybe \$350 worth of lumber here. Of course, I still need to dry it and plane it.” For drying, Floyd puts the boards in his basement with a dehumidifier. “I can put it in

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The blade guides are sealed bearings above and behind the blade, and a brass plate below it.

the basement for two weeks, and it's ready to use," he explained. "I realized I needed to dry the boards before putting them up when I put up some paneling on the walls, and a week later, there was a perfect 1/4-inch gap between each board."

"The most I've ever cut in one day was 800 board feet," Floyd told me. We can average around 500

board feet per day." To people with larger bandmills, this may seem like a modest amount of lumber for a day's work, but Floyd is pleased with it. "We spent one day cutting, then went down to Home Depot to see what the same amount of lumber would have cost, and I didn't do half-bad. Right now, I wouldn't take my money back for this machine and have to do without it. It's just so nice, when you need a certain size board to come out here and cut it." Summing up his experience with the mill, Floyd says, "I think they've got a good product for the money."

Once the house is built, Floyd has more plans for the mill. "I've cut a few boards for some friends and relatives, but I turn down a lot of work, because I need to use it for my own house. I've had several people hit me up for little jobs, but right now, our work is the most important." After he "retires" from his business and finishes his house, however, he intends to accommo-

date some of those requests.

As a final note, although Mister Sawmill is normally painted Ford blue, they will custom paint the mill, at the customer's request, to match other equipment, or a truck. Hmmm, I wonder if they could paint one tan with spots of primer, rust, and bondo to match my old Chevy. Of course, they'd have to put a few dents in it for a true match. They'd probably charge extra for that! ■

David Boyt is a frequent contributing writer to Sawmill & Woodlot magazine.



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