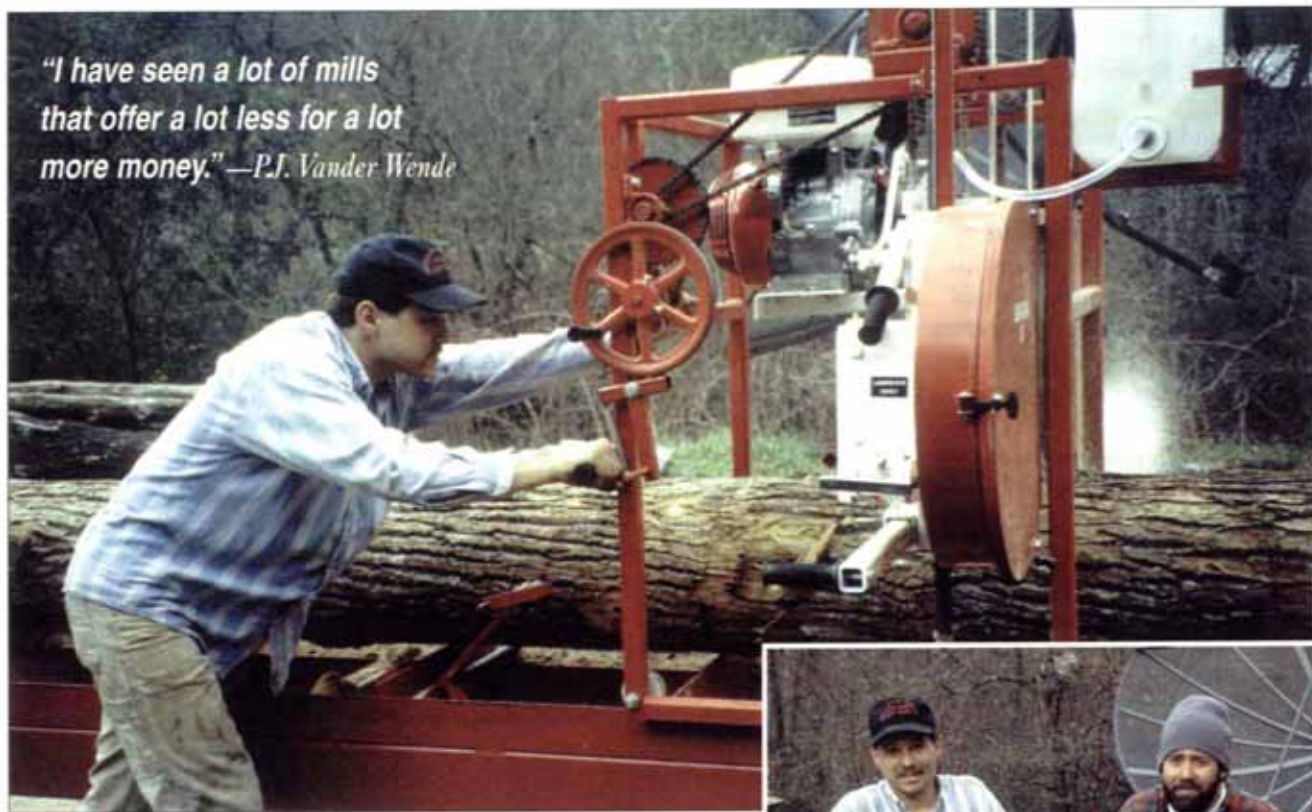


*"I have seen a lot of mills that offer a lot less for a lot more money." —P.J. Vander Wende*



PHOTOS BY JOE DENIG

## Enercraft Silva-Saw Model 18

Reviewed by Joe Denig



**H**ave you ever worried about the youth of today? Does the next generation have the work ethic of past generations? Has the virtual reality of today's computer-oriented world deprived them of the ability to use their mechanical ingenuity and hands to solve problems? In the interview I conducted for this review of the Enercraft Silva-Saw, I found the next generation is very capable and ready to take

on the challenges of life.

I came to this conclusion after I met P.J. Vender Wende, the operator of an Enercraft Silva-Saw Model 18. P.J. is a 21-year-old with an extremely good attitude towards life, a strong work ethic, and mechanical wisdom and talent beyond his years. His working partner is Kris Mattioli, and together the two are trying to make a living in the mountains of western North Carolina. P.J. operates the sawmill with Kris' help, and in

return, P.J. helps Kris run a split rail fence company. They also have several other interests that they cooperate on.

P.J. had only owned the Silva-Saw for six weeks when I visited with him. But both P.J. and Kris are familiar with the workings of a narrow blade bandsaw mill after having assisted on a Wood-Mizer. The Silva-Saw Model 18 is a no-frills mill designed to do a job with a minimum of expense. The mill lacks high-priced options such

as hydraulic feed, log loading, and log dogging. But it does saw lumber!

The first thing I noticed was the trailer frame the mill was mounted on. I asked P.J. if he knew the size of the steel tubing that was used in the track frame, and, with great confidence, he replied 3x6 inch tubing with a 1/4-inch wall thickness. How did he know these facts right off the top of his head? Why, he built the frame and trailer the mill rested on. This was my first clue

P.J. had a great deal of mechanical and welding ability. P.J. had welded the factory-supplied track to the track frame/trailer he had constructed. To his credit, you could not tell where the factory work stopped and his started. Enercraft does plan to offer a factory-made trailer in the near future. The factory-supplied track on the Model 18 is constructed of 3x3 1/2x1/4-inch thick angle iron, and the carriage wheels are fabricated out of ductile steel. To prevent sawdust buildup, P.J. added track and wheel cleaners. In the future he plans to add grease fittings to the carriage wheels as well.

The four-post box frame supporting the bandsaw head is built of 1 1/2-inch steel tubing. The band wheels are 18-inch cast iron pulleys with a V-belt

**P.J. VanderWende (top photo) is the only power behind the carriage drive on his all manual Model 18.**

**P.J. and business partner Kris Mattioli have several wood-related irons in the fire.**

mounted on each for the blade to ride on. The tensioning system for the blade consists of a screw device that compresses a spring. To apply the proper amount of strain to the blade, the screw is simply tightened until an indicator pointer is aligned with a mark. P.J. was using slightly less strain than recommended because he felt it gave him better service from the saw blades he

likes to use. The bearings supporting the wheels are on fabricated hinged mounts that allow for adjustment of the band wheel alignment. The cover for the bandsaw housing is made out of plywood. P.J. said plywood is a good alternative to the sheet metal covers most manufacturers use, because band blades tended not to break when they came off of the wheels and hit the cover. Also, he felt the plywood cover did not rattle or vibrate as much as a metal one would, which made for quieter sawing.

Two ball bearing guides stabilize the blade, one on each side of the cut. One guide is fixed and the other is adjustable. A drip blade lubrication system is supplied with mill. P.J. uses water as a lubricant and feels it serves its purpose well and is more environmentally friendly than petroleum-based lubricants.

P.J.'s Model 18 is powered by an 11 HP Honda gas engine with a manual start. P.J. said it provided adequate power in most situations. On occasion when the engine does bog down in deeper cuts or with denser wood, P.J. said he simply adjusts the feed. Enercraft does offer a 13 HP motor as an option on the mill.

The mill is designed to saw logs a maximum of 24 inches by 16 feet. Due to the box frame construction of the saw head, the 24-inch restriction includes anything that would project out of a straight 24-inch cylinder. So a 24-inch

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## PORTABLE SAWMILL *Review*

diameter log could not have any sweep or any other protrusions outside of this theoretical cylinder, or it would block the passage of the saw head.

The saw head is raised and lowered using a hand crank and roller from either side of the saw head. A series of small to large sprockets creates the mechanical advantage needed to move the head, and a simple scale board is used to eyeball the sets.

The mill comes equipped with two sets of log dogs and cant and lumber dogs. Both of these are set manually. The dogs can be located three different places along the track. P.J. showed me where the dogs had been bent from turning large logs against them. He hopes that in the future they can be built from heavier or higher-grade steel to prevent this problem. Enercraft's

response to this was that perhaps the dogs were set too high for large logs, thus in effect creating a lever arm. Their recommendation to solve the problem was, "by setting them [dogs] lower to increase support." This in turn may pose another problem. When a large log is turned it may roll off if only a limited portion of the dog is protruding.

The carriage on this saw is pushed up and down the track manually. As mentioned previously, manual feeding allows the sawyer to hear and feel the load being placed on the blade. P.J. Vender Wende likes how the controls for the mill are conveniently located on the saw head.

How does the Enercraft Silva-Saw perform?

The mill had no problem slicing through a yellow poplar log P.J. and Kris were sawing the day I was

there. I timed how long it took to saw a 16-foot cut, six inches wide, and the result was 16 seconds, or a feed rate of one foot per second in yellow poplar. I could tell P.J. and Kris worked together often by their coordinated movements. The two of them easily turned the logs using cant hooks and handled the removal of the lumber sawn by the mill well. P.J. said of the Silva-Saw's operation, "It does what it is supposed to do." He also said, "I have seen a lot of mills that offer a lot less for a lot more money."

The surface finish of the lumber was smooth and the sizing consistent, except for the last board from a log. P.J. said he thought the cross pieces that support the log and/or cant in the track frame



Log turning on the Model 18 is all "Armstrong" power.

might be slightly out of level, making the last board a little thicker on one end than another. He felt the minimum thickness for the last board was 5/4, and if he sawed any thinner than 5/4 he would be in danger of running the saw into dogs. However, when asked about this, Enercraft said on other Model 18s they have sawn successfully to a 4/4 board. "If the tracks are set up level, it should make the 4/4 cut all the way from one end to the other," responded

*Continued on page 19*

### ENERCRAFT SILVA-SAW MODEL 18 SPEC SHEET

#### NAME & MODEL NUMBER

Enercraft Silva-Saw Model 18

#### MANUFACTURER & ADDRESS

Enercraft Silva-Saw Ltd  
2365 Cassell Drive  
Hillsdale, Ontario L0L 1V0  
Canada 1-800-387-5553

#### MILL OVERVIEW

Band or Circle Mill: Band

Stationary or Portable: Stationary

Standard Equipment: blade guides, blade drip system, four manual dogs

Cutting Capacity: (diameter and length):  
24-inch diameter and 16-foot length

Weight: 650 pounds

Length & Width: 20 feet by 68 inches

#### FRAME & CARRIAGE

Size and Construction of Frame:  
1 1/2-inch tubing

Tracks are made of: 3 x 3 1/2" angle iron

Are Tracks Replaceable? Yes

Wheels are Made of: Ductile Steel

Carriage Bearings: 5/8 needle

Carriage Support System: 4-post box frame

#### SAWING HEAD

Wheel Diameter: 18 inches

Wheel Face: 3/4 inches

Wheel Construction: Cast Iron

Wheel Shaft: 1 7/16 inches

Wheel Speed (RPM): 1,000

Saw Speed (SFPM): 4,500

Recommended Saw Blade: 12 feet 5 inch  
x 1 1/4 x .035 inches

#### GUIDES AND STRAIN SYSTEM

Type of Guides: Roller

Strain System Used: Compression spring

Wheel Tilting System: Hinge plates on  
both sides

#### SETWORKS

Method of Setwork Drive: Chain lift

Set Display: Ruler

Automatic Sets? No

#### ALIGNMENT

How is Alignment Done at Factory?:  
Dial indicators and straight edge jigs

#### POWER PLANT

Standard: 11 HP Honda gas

Optional: 13 HP Honda gas

#### LOG TURNER

None

#### LOG LOADER

None

#### LOG DOGS

4, hand set

#### CARRIAGE FEED DRIVE

Type (hydraulic, electrical, mechanical,  
or manual): manual

#### TOWING

Towing package available soon

#### GUARANTEE:

1 year on all components except belts, 2  
years on engine

#### OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Shingle attachment, bevel lap siding attachment, different track lengths

#### BASE PRICE

\$4,995

## PORTABLE SAWMILL *Review*

Continued from page 6

Enercraft. Being out of level might be the explanation why P.J. could not saw down to a 4/4 board, since his last board was thicker on one end than the other.

I asked P.J. what type of saw sharpening and setting system he used. He said he purchased a system from Timber Wolf and was also using their brand blades. Because the mill was so new, and because he was getting such excellent service from the blades, he has not yet had to sharpen any blades. Each blade reportedly lasts for more than 1,000 board feet of lumber. To get the extended blade life, P.J. power washes all of his logs to remove mud and rocks. In the future he plans to make a station

that will rotate the logs as he power washes them.

As a footnote, it is always fascinating to see how individuals earn an income, especially in areas that do not have many opportunities. Kris Mattioli, P.J.'s sawmill helper, has a business that produces custom split rail locust fences. P.J. built a splitter for him that will split a 10-foot rail. When the two get a fence job they try to supply all of the labor from splitting the fence to installing it in order to maximize their income potential. Commenting on Kris' and

his philosophy of work, P.J. says, "I will do whatever it takes to make a dollar,—we aren't afraid of hard work."

P.J. originally bought the Silva-Saw to saw lumber for his family's campground and to custom saw. He said he has received several compliments from customers on how good his lumber looks. One of P.J. and Kris' side businesses is producing firewood for campground customers, which gives them a ready market for their slabs.

P.J. did research for "two to three years" before purchasing a sawmill. From talking to

him he seemed pleased with his new mill. I asked about his purchasing experience, and P.J. said the personnel from Enercraft were extremely helpful, both prior to purchase and when he picked up the mill in Missouri.

The Enercraft Silva-Saw lives up to what it is advertised as. It is inexpensive, has no frills, and performs. It is well thought out and is a good value for the person who wants to occasionally saw and who does not mind supplying some manual labor, or for someone who wants to cut a bit more and has a good assistant and access to a log loader. ■

### MANUFACTURER'S COMMENTS:

This model is a solid, well-built sawmill designed for the hobbyist or Do-It-Yourselfer. Its ease of operation, low maintenance costs and simple design make it a solid value for anyone wanting to produce quality lumber up to 1,000 board feet a day without spending a fortune.

*Joe Denig is a Wood Products Extension Specialist at North Carolina State University's College of Forest Resources.*

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