



Hud-Son 52 Oscar

Sometimes, no matter how big your sawmill is, you wish it were just a little bigger to squeeze through that monster log. It is human nature to push ourselves and our equipment to the limit. For most band saw owners, that means pulling out your biggest chain saw and trimming the log to fit—or even quartering it lengthwise. There are slabbing attachments for swing blade mills which are designed for big logs, but the Hud-Son Oscar 52 wide band saw mill—which can also handle logs up to 52 inches in diameter, as well as “normal” logs—is a unique, economical band saw solution. The company name “Hud-Son,” buy the way, is a combination of the founder’s last name, “Hudon” and “Son,” as it became and continues to operate as a family business.

Ken Barrett, of Barneveld, NY, has found the Oscar 52 to be an ideal sawmill for his part-time business of sawing wide slabs. Ken has worked for Hud-Son

The Oscar 52 is put to the test with a 48-in. diameter maple log at the 2017 Paul Bunyan show near Cambridge, OH. It takes over an hour to mill a log of this size, but with a 52-in. maximum diameter and 20-in. throat, the mill was up to the job.

sawmills for nearly 7 years and is now Shipping Manager. “I test just about every sawmill that we ship out,” he explained. Ken started milling on his own when a customer asked if he would be willing to help him fill a large order. “I said sure, and gave it a shot, and I really enjoyed doing it,” he recalled. After that, Ken borrowed a sawmill from Hud-Son to saw some timber for his house. “That’s what really got me going on running a sawmill, he said. “I ran that sawmill for a few years, then I purchased one of my own.”

According to Ken, the Oscar 52 fills a niche. “You get to mill a lot of wood that would otherwise just be junk

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because it is too big for other sawmills,” he explained. “We have a lot of maple, some black walnut, oak, ash, cherry, and pine.” Ken says his mill slabs these oversize logs with no problem, and that the thin kerf blade cuts faster, smoother, and more efficiently than chain saw slabbers. “It is a perfect machine for slabbing, and also for breaking logs down for quarter sawing,” he noted. Ken says the mill is also good for slicing up smaller logs, and that he has used it to mill smaller logs for board and batten siding for his house, plus enough lumber for a tree house.

For his business, though, Ken depends on the Oscar 52 to cut large slabs. “I do pretty well selling slabs,” he said. “My business is in its infancy, but it seems like something good happens every year, and I get a little bigger.” While Ken gets many of his customers through word of mouth, he also credits his wife’s marketing efforts. “My wife Nichole is the brains behind the operation. She does a lot of the advertisement and marketing. I get focused on working and she helps me think outside of the box and to come up with different ideas,” he explained. Ken also makes some furniture, mostly to show what the slabs can do. He displays his slabs and furniture at local shows and craft festivals. A display at a recent home show also generated a lot of interest in his slabs and furniture.

“The way I broke into it was kind of a cool story,” recalled Ken. Here is his account of his first major sale.

“My wife has family in North Carolina. A few years ago, when we planned to visit, my father-in-law suggested I take his truck and 30-foot gooseneck trailer with a load of slabs. He started posting on Craigslist a couple of weeks before I left, so I set up appointments. I parked in a local grocery store parking lot, and I set times to meet everybody. The first day, the first trip, I sold a 30-foot trailer of slabs, just by advertising on Craigslist. I was parked there, people would go through it, find the slab they wanted, load it on their truck, and then the next person would call. We did that several times, and people would place an order for what they wanted, I’d come down, and they’d check it out. That’s how it really took off.”

Ken says he finds that the wide slab market is getting bigger, with more people getting involved in it—



Wide slabs are currently in high demand by woodworkers. Ken shows off a 32-in. wide slab freshly cut by his Oscar 52. The 2-in. thick slab will air-dry for a year before going into a kiln for final drying.

both as customers, as well as more sawmills producing it. In addition to innovative marketing, he has found that offering a variety of woods is helpful, and he is also testing the market for quartersawn oak flooring.

Ken air dries his lumber in a shed for at least a year before selling it and is still learning how to minimize checking and warping on his big slabs. Even with end coating, he says, some end checking is almost inevitable in hardwoods. He has also found that some species tend to warp during drying. “Maple wants to move a lot. I cut it three or four inches thick so I can come back and resaw it in a year. Walnut, on the other hand doesn’t move so much,” he noted. Ken uses the “European” method of drying lumber, stacking it back in log form with stickers, then putting ratchet straps on them. “It seems to help with the cupping,” he observed. The slabs air dry for at least a year before Ken sells them. According to Ken, the mill cuts smoothly enough that the rough slabs are ready for sanding, as long as they don’t cup too much as they dry.

Although the Oscar 52 features larger engine options, Ken feels that the 23-horsepower Briggs & Stratton engine is well matched to his cutting requirements. It uses 1-1/2-wide blades with teflon block guides. “As long as you keep the blocks adjusted, use a sharp blade, and have adequate tension, it gives straight, smooth cuts, even on wide slabs,” says Ken. He noted that he checks the guides every time he puts on a log, and that it takes only a few seconds to adjust them with an Allen wrench. In addition to wide cuts, the Oscar 52 has a maximum depth of cut (board thickness) of 20 inches. This makes the mill ideal for split-

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Max log capacity	52 in. diameter
Distance between guide.....	48 in.
Max thickness of cut.....	20 in.
Standard track length.....	21 ft./ 3 ft. – 7 ft. sections
Log dogs	3 cam style dogs & square posts
Max log length	16 ft.
Blade	221 X 1.5 X .042 in.
Blade lubrication5 gal.
Track sweeps	Yes
Engine/motor	23-hp gas – electric start
Clutch engagement	centrifugal
Frame	4 post with lift tubes
Bandwheels.....	25 in.
Guide system.....	dual shoe guides, 1 adjustable
Lift system	power lift system w/ control
Measuring	dual scale 1 in. and 4,5,6,8 quarter
Main bearings.....	1 15/16 in.



With a 48-in. width cutting capacity, the Oscar 52 has no problem slabbing irregular shapes, allowing the sawyer to make unique lumber available to woodworking customers.

ting logs for quarter sawing lumber. Ken says he does quartersaw some oak to get the distinctive grain pattern. “I haven’t mastered it yet, but I’m getting better at quartersawing, since quartersawn oak sells better than slabs,” he explained. While the Oscar can be transported, its nine-foot wide profile is not easily moved down the road, so Ken has his set up stationary. He says in the two years he has run it, the mill has worked well for him. “My 52 runs perfectly,” he says. “It is set up perfectly for me, and I’m happy with it.”

The mill comes standard with an electric winch to raise and lower the head. To take some of the effort out of running the mill, Ken’s machine also has the power feed option. “It’s a real back saver,” he says. “I do my best to find a spot where the log is well balanced, cut off a slab, then roll it half way around and take off one slab at a time. Loading and turning logs that can weigh well over a ton and off-bearing 300-pound slabs takes more than a strong arm and a good cant hook. Fortunately, Ken’s father-in-law lets him use his telehandler fork lift for these tasks. Even with the power feed and fork lift, Ken says that it takes as much as an hour and a half to mill a log. The actual sawing is easily a one-person operation, but when off-loading and stacking the slabs, he says that extra muscle from second or even third person is most welcome. “Ninety-five percent of the time, I work by myself,” he said, “but I have a couple of guys that help when I need it.”

Ken partners in a small log brokerage business which supplies many of the logs that go on his mill. “We buy standing walnut timber,” he explained. “The ones too big for a conventional sawmill go on the Oscar.” He also put the word out to local tree services, which supply him with maple and oak. Naturally,

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working with urban lumber, Ken has plenty of stories about the metal he has run into. “I’ve run into trash metal a few times. I’ve hit a few insulators. One cherry tree had 72 rings to it, and I hit an electrical box, right in the middle. No idea how that happened!”

So far, Ken says, there have been no maintenance issues with his mill. “I did have to change a guide bearing after I smashed it into the limb of a log, but that was my fault,” he admitted. After running the mill for two years, he recently replaced the teflon blade guides, but everything has been routine (changing oil, filters, etc.). “I’m a wood person, but I’m not very mechanically inclined,” explained Ken, “But everything on it is pretty straightforward, not a lot to go wrong. It is tried and tested, and it works.”

Ken says he likes the balance between his full-time job at Hud-Son and part-time work with the sawmill. “I was always told by older folks that if you enjoy it, don’t make a living from it, so I’d rather just keep it small. I have two little boys, ages seven and three, and I’m learning that they are growing up fast, so I don’t want to spend all my time working. It isn’t overwhelming me, it is still enjoyable. I’m the boss, and that’s cool,” he concluded. ■

Dave Boyt has a BS degree in Forest Management and an MS in Wood Technology. He manages a tree farm (2006 Missouri Tree Farm of the Year), and operates a band saw sawmill.



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 Drying Time1 week per inch
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 InstallationInside, level ground or slab, water connection, 208-230V power connection
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