

Gary's Mill



Gary Francis says that he can manufacture about 800 board feet of lumber per hour using his TimberKing 2200 band saw mill.



Hydraulics, board return and debarker were important features when Gary Francis went shopping for a new band saw. He got it with the TimberKing 2200. These features reduce his back pain and minimize the potential for grit, which is deadly to band saw mill blades.

Putting Up His Own Shingle

Tired of plying his skills as a sawyer for other custom sawmilling businesses, Nipawin, Saskatchewan area resident Gary Francis dreamed of one day working from home and putting up his own shingle. A few years ago, he took the plunge, with a business simply known as Gary's Mill.

Located about 12 miles north of Nipawin, business at Gary's Mill is steady. The backbone of the business is a TimberKing 2200 portable, one-man, band sawmill he purchased two years ago. TimberKing is the oldest manufacturer of one-man sawmills in the United States and is located in Kansas City, Missouri.

"The wood doesn't sit here for very long," says Francis. "There's a big demand for band saw lumber because it has a smoother finish and the boards are true from one end to the other."

An avid gun collector and hunter, with decades of experience working in the forest industry, Francis is definitely in his element. He has worked for decades in the industry, starting to pile lumber at a sawmill owned by his dad and uncle at just 8 years old. Francis says, given his experience, his close proximity to a vast forest resource right in his own backyard, and plenty of demand for wood products particularly from the local farming community, he and his wife, Joanne, decided a few years ago that the time was right to start their own custom sawmilling venture.

Gary's Mill manufactures a variety of custom wood products. His most popular wood products are dimension lumber from 2 inches x 4 inches to 2 inches x 10 inches. He also markets live or rough-edged 1-inch lumber primarily for corral windbreak boards, and timbers in a variety of dimensions, some as large as 10 inches x 10 inches. Lately, he has also been manufacturing thick and wide planks for customers wanting to use the material to make tables and benches. There is a good local market for 2-inch x 8-inch and 2-inch x 10-inch dimension lumber for use as corral planking.

While plenty of business is still done over the phone or by customers driving into the yard, Gary's Mill does a significant amount of business from their website as well as their

Facebook presence. “Having that Internet presence definitely helps, because you can post photos and some video clips,” says Francis. “After seeing what we have on the Internet, we’ve had people come out just to have a look, and when they do, they are quite impressed with the quality and say that they will be back.”

When Francis decided to start his own custom sawmilling venture, he looked at a number of band mill suppliers. “When I went shopping for a band saw mill, I wanted fully hydraulic features, with a board return and debarker, which to me is critical because wood logged in the summertime can get pretty dirty. Dirt and band saw mills don’t mix,” Francis says. “And I wanted a diesel-powered unit because it is more user-friendly and cheaper to operate than gasoline.” His previous mill was gas-powered and it burned considerable fuel versus production. With the TimberKing 2200, it burns about 3 gallons of diesel fuel in 8 hours of sawmilling.

Among the features Francis appreciates about his TimberKing 2200 sawmill is its sturdy construction. The company began manufacturing portable band mills in 1989, making the TimberKing 2200 model available in 2008. With a 49-hp Kubota diesel engine, there is good reason why this particular model is built strong. TimberKing’s goal was to offer a heavy industrial mill that was well-suited to tackle the biggest trees from old-growth woodlots. So, it comes equipped with what the company describes as its “most massive solid-welded Big 3 Super Structure.”

The sawmill will process logs up to 24 feet long and 39 inches in diameter. Typically, Francis prefers to process logs 16 feet long, which gives him the option of producing two, 8-foot board lengths. Although he is equipped to log, it’s cheaper for Gary to purchase oversized logs from other suppliers, and he also has family



Spruce logs are among the most difficult logs to saw on a band saw mill because they have soft wood and hard knots that can result in wavy lumber.

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connections with woodlots containing larger-diameter timber.

Advertised as a one-man sawmill, Francis says that based on the TimberKing 2200's design, one person can definitely operate the sawmill and stack lumber, estimating that with the right log mix, he can manufacture about 800 board feet per hour. Sawing a 16-foot-long, 1-inch-wide log takes him about 40 seconds per cut. But with a history of back problems, he often calls on a neighbor to help pile the lumber, and he appreciates that the band mill's setworks and hydraulics minimize the amount of manual labor required while also speeding up production. This is important when cutting primarily building material from white spruce. The band mill comes equipped with direct-action, hydraulic log handling, and what TimberKing says is its most advanced computer setworks. Among the hydraulic features on the band mill are blade feed, blade up/down, log loaders, bidirectional chain log turner, direct-action log clamp, four vertical log stops, and roller toeboards. The setworks are also fully programmable.

Other standard features on the sawmill include a massive cut throat, electric blade clutch, side-wide support jacks, greaseable blade guides, moveable guide roller, tandem axle, and operator-height swing command post.

Francis says he appreciates the large cutting throat on the mill, its ability to saw 24-foot-long logs, and the tandem axle for towing but, as he will attest, a sawmill is only as good as the sawyer. "The most crucial point is the blade sharpness and set," says Francis. "I mainly saw white spruce, and what I've been told is that it is the most fussy wood you can saw in this country on a



Daily production isn't over at Gary's Mill till the band saw blades are sharpened for tomorrow's production.

band mill because of the soft wood and hard knots." He says that it takes a lot of skill. If the sawing is done too quickly or the set on the blade is not quite right, the result is wavy lumber.

Francis also produces wood products from jackpine (although larger-dimension pine logs are harder to come by), poplar for trailer decking, and the occasional eastern larch.

He uses 1-1/2-inch-wide, 7/8-pitch, double-hard blades that are 177 inches long. Blade use and sharpness vary depending on the logs he is sawing. He uses TimberKing's Talon automatic sharpener and manual setter to prepare his blades.

While the sawmill is portable, Francis has it set up almost on a permanent basis in his yard. He has discovered that with the 4-post head on this TimberKing band mill, it is extremely important to take the time to ensure that the sawmill is level before starting production. This ensures that the band mill is cutting accurately. For that reason, he prefers to leave it in one place. But on the positive side, with the support provided by the 4-post head, there is very little side-to-side movement on the carriage.

Francis says that TimberKing's long history supplying band saw mills helped him to make his purchasing decision. ■



Large, live-edge boards produced at Gary's Mill are sold for tabletops and benches.

Tony Kryzanowski is an award-winning, Canadian-based writer with over 25 years' experience reporting on many aspects of sawmilling and woodlot management in both Canada and parts of the United States. He is passionate about small-scale sawmilling, sustainable forest management, and maintenance of forest biodiversity and ecosystems.

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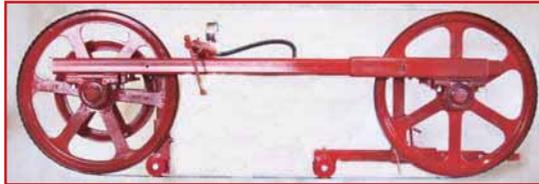
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