



“For a one- or two-man band saw operation, this is as good as I think you’re going to get,” says Canadian sawyer Bruce Baker.

“EVERY TIME I WORK ON IT, IT’S A JOY.”

TimberKing 2400

When I pulled up to the U.S.-Canadian border crossing station early in the morning, I had to answer questions about where I was going and why. When I told them I was on my way to visit Bruce Baker near Midway, B.C., some 60 miles away, they said, “OK, we know Bruce.” In this impersonal world, that was already enough to make the trip worthwhile! “The line between British Columbia and Washington state is right on the south end of our property,” Bruce had informed me.

Bruce Baker owns 450 acres of mountain landscape, with another 1,500 acres of crown management land, which gives him the right to manage the land and remove about

50 truckloads of timber each year. He does this with a variety of equipment, ranging from his eight Percheron draft horses to an 8540 Kubota with a Fransgard winch. Two years ago, he purchased a TimberKing 2400 sawmill.

As we talked, it was evident that Bruce’s love for the land came from a stewardship ethic, which was seen in his logging operation. He takes the worst first, leaving vibrant, healthy stands of larch and Douglas fir, with some cedar, spruce, and pine. “It’s not the method, it’s the man,” he told me. “A horse logger can high-grade with the best of them.”

Bruce found that his philosophy of worst-first forestry did not pencil out economically in a standard

market, but that he could improve it five-fold if he added value to the timber. He cuts cants for other mills to resaw, and also mills posts and beams for timber frame houses. About half goes out as cants and milled lumber, and half as logs. Much of his production is exported to the U.S.

The Choice of a Mill

Bruce started out with a small manual band mill, and then moved up to a larger one to cut posts and beams—up to 24 feet long. “The manual mills were accurate, but just not built heavy enough,” he recalled. “Plus, I’m 62 years old. I decided that if I was going to stay in the business, I would need the mill to turn the logs for me.” While



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still using his manual mill, Bruce got all the information he could from sawmill manufacturers. His research included talking to area sawyers to find out what would and—as was the case with “Wavy Board” Smith—would not work well for his purposes.

Bruce wanted a production mill that could be run by one or two people, and was fully hydraulic and heavy enough to handle 24-foot-long by 30-inch-diameter larch and Douglas fir logs. He was also tired of breaking bands on the 18-inch band wheels of his manual mill. He narrowed his search to just a few mills, but the TimberKing’s 25-inch loose belt band wheels put it over the top. “Manufacturers who use solid steel band wheels recommend diesel fuel as a lubricant for their blades. I have a hard enough time paying for the diesel fuel I put in the tank, never mind the stuff I drip on the blades.” He continued, “Plus I figured if you’ve got a stationary sawmill, and you’re dripping diesel on the blade for 20

TimberKing 2400

Max log diameter	39 in.
Max width of cut	36 in.
Cutting deck support	Four post, twin beam
Bed length	28 ft.
Max cutting length	24 ft.
Min thickness of final cut	1 in.
Weight	6,000 lbs.
Towing package	Tandem axles
Hitch	2-5/16 ball
Electric brakes	Standard
Electric breakaway brakes	Standard
Band wheel diameter	25 in.
Band wheel surface	Loose belt
Band	1-1/2
Band tensioning	Spring mechanical
Board drag-back	Standard
Networks	Computer controlled, hydraulic cylinder and chain
Log turner	Bidirectional chain
Carriage feed	Direct-action hydraulic, chain and sprocket
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Log lifter	Direct-action hydraulic
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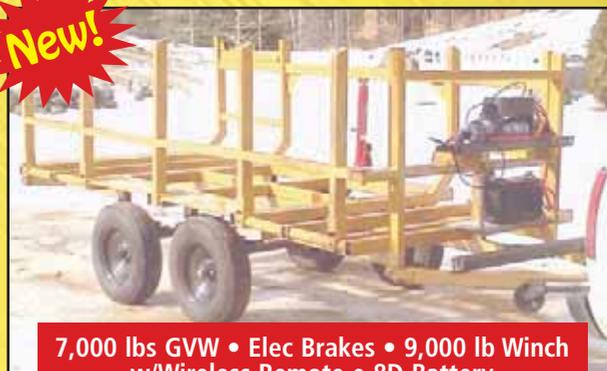


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years, there's bound to be some diesel in the ground." Bruce says that the loose belt on the 2400 band wheel works well with no lubricant, except with larch, which has pitch pockets. For larch, he uses water or, in cold weather, a windshield washer antifreeze mix.

Performance of the TimberKing 2400

Bruce noted that cold temperatures affect the mill's hydraulics. "I run straight hydraulic fluid even in the winter, so it does slow down when it gets cold. I'll probably start using thinner oil in the winter, but for now, I just let it warm up." He went on to mention that the hydraulic relays have given him some difficulty in cold weather, but concluded that "most people shut down their machines when it gets to minus 20°F anyway."

When a heat wave raises the temperature to a balmy 0°F, Bruce finds that the controls work smoothly, and that the accuracy of the cut exceeds his customers'



Bruce uses his Kubota tractor with log grapple to place a log on the mill's lifting arm. Once the log is in place, Bruce says that the arm easily lifts 30-in.-diameter by 24 ft. long larch and Douglas fir logs.

requirements for straight beams. He put it this way: "These beams are valuable, and if you mess up on a cut, you can lose \$100." Bruce believes that a chain feed on both sides of the mill helps keep the feed consistent and the cut straight. With the 36-inch throat

and the 20-inch depth of cut, Bruce's timber sizes are basically only limited by the size of the logs he can source. The 48-hp diesel runs the 1-1/2-inch-wide blade through the wood at a good pace, and he has only broken a few blades in the roughly 300 hours he

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Sawyer's-eye view of the 2400. All hydraulics, electrical controls, and engine gauges are in the pivoting command post. According to Bruce, the mill's design and heavy construction allow him to exceed his customers' requirements for straight, smooth beams.

has put on the machine so far. "I bought 36 blades with the mill, and I'm still using those blades," he explained. He attributes part of the long life of the blades to the mill's larger band wheels. Another contributing factor, he believes, is his TimberKing sharpener and blade setter. "It is the third sharpener and setter that I've owned, and it is by far the best one. I've sharpened at least 150 blades, and that wheel hasn't worn down a bit. It does a beautiful job of grinding."

Bruce knew that the 6,000-pound mill was built heavy enough to handle the logs that it would be cutting, but he was pleasantly surprised by the capacity of the lifting arm. "Last week I put a huge log on the mill. It was 24 feet long, and probably 30 inches in diameter. Before I started to lift it, I moved my tractor to assist the log lifters. The front-end loader has a 3,500-pound lift, and could barely budge the log. The loader on the mill lifted the log like it didn't even know it was there. They say it can lift up

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to 10,000 pounds, and I believe it.” The mill’s log turner and clamping system also work well for these logs, but Bruce found the toeboard rollers a little light for his use. He noted that TimberKing is working on heavier toeboards.

While the mill is equipped with a board drag-back, Bruce finds it more practical to offbear beams to the side. He also says he has a better view of the log when the drag-back is out of the way, but that it is useful when cutting boards. “When I do use the drag-back, it works surprisingly well.” The controls are on a swiveling “command post” that can be swung out of the way of the drag-back boards, and can also be positioned to best see the log and watch the cut.

One feature Bruce doesn’t use is the computerized networks. “I hate computers,” he explained. “I’m a derelict from the Cossacks, and would rather hitch up a team of horses than turn on a computer. But I’ll get around to using it.” Instead, he uses the manual blade height



With the command post swung to the side for a better view, Bruce makes a slabbing cut for a beam. As a one-man operation, he says that he depends on the hydraulic log handling (lifting, turning, toe boards and clamping) capabilities of his mill.

adjustment. With chains on both sides of the carriage driven by a hydraulic cylinder, Bruce has found it to be smooth and consistent.

The “energy chain” carries hydraulic and electric lines that are protected in a high-impact plastic track that reels out and back as the saw moves on the track. Bruce noted that it has both good points and drawbacks. It is well supported

and strong enough to walk on when working on the engine. On the downside, the energy chain forces him to reach out an extra foot when offbearing boards and beams from the side. He is quick to note that this would not be an issue for anyone using the drag-back.

I watched Bruce bring a nice Douglas fir log to the mill with his tractor, and then lift it onto the mill

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with the hydraulic arms. He was sure of what he was doing and how he was going to take the log apart for best value. Every once in a while he would use the quick idle-down to point out how well the backstops grabbed the sweep of the log, or how he would toe it up to get the straightest grain. Then he would throttle up and engage the electric clutch to demonstrate. Bruce doesn't cut for inventory, except for a few standard sizes he knows will sell soon, so he is focused on the larger timbers he has on order and the logs that will produce those free of center pieces.

A One-Man Operation

As we talked about equipment for sawmilling and logging, our conversation wandered to other related topics—the timber industry, for instance, with mills closing, and the declining lumber market. “Four or five big mills within a 100-mile radius have closed down. We have

35% unemployment around here, so you can hardly give a log away,” he lamented. This brought around the conversation to Bruce's take on how to make a living in these commercial markets. “To get the benefit of a bigger saw, you need a five-man crew and an edger. I'm exactly where I want to be. I am on the top of the band mill market for a one-man operation. The manual mill often took two men to turn the log with cant hooks. For the last year, I've been working alone, and I've gotten to where I kind of like it. No workman's compensation to pay, no employee breaking stuff. The 2400 works well for a one-man operation.”

Bruce summed up his experience with the mill and with the TimberKing company. “I am quite satisfied. It is nearly everything I thought it would be. They've been real good about working with me on the mill.” His biggest complaint is that the mill is too small! “I'll probably get a 12-foot extension one of

these days,” he said. “I've missed out on a few orders because I'm limited to 24 feet.” About half of Bruce's time is spent working on the farm and ranch part of the business. He believes that this makes it even more important to have a high-capacity mill. “When I am sawing, I have to get stuff done, so I need a top-of-the-line sawmill. In my opinion, within the band saw market, the 2400 is near the top.” To watch Bruce “getting stuff done,” go to the TimberKing website (www.timberking.com), and click on the More Videos button. ■

Mark Havel is an Oregon forest landowner, engineer, and product and equipment developer. He may be remembered as the founder and manufacturer of Future Forestry Products Inc. log arches and pruning equipment. That line is now manufactured by LogRite Tools. He operates an engineering business, www.haveldesigns.com, as well as a forest stewardship education model under the character of Forest Dan, www.forestdan.com.



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