

Lucas Model 8 Slabber

When you ask experienced owners of any portable sawmill how they handle heavy, large-diameter logs, you'll hear all sorts of tips and tricks in reply about how to manhandle the beasts. Just about anything is fair game—fidgiting with hydraulics, homemade jigs, whittling them down with a chain saw, jumping up and down on the cant hook, even calling in the assistance of a backhoe or bulldozer.

Last spring I got a phone call from a customer who works for a logging company that clears 10 to 20 acres a week, and so he frequently encounters large logs (3 to 5 feet in diameter) that are too big to run through his band mill. He hired me to cut slabs from a massive white oak log that was 20 feet long and 37 inches in diameter on the small end—a log so heavy that it took three skid loaders to load it on the semi for transport!

When dealing with logs of such great size, there are a number of challenges in converting them into lumber or slabs. A fair amount of my business comes from sawing up large logs into slabs used for table-

tops, countertops, and other miscellaneous uses. A surprising number of these customers actually own or have access to a mill—like a band saw, or even a large commercial mill. But many of these mills stumble with logs larger than 36 inches in diameter. So while the customer may have a technique for sawing logs that large into lumber, many mills do not have the capacity to saw them into flitches (slabs). And when you're talking about logs that can weigh upwards of 4 tons, tips and tricks will only get you so far, and safety becomes a primary concern. I have found that when dealing with logs of excessive size and weight, it's much easier to leave the log where it lies, and sim-

ply saw in place. To accomplish that, I turn to my Lucas Model 8 Slabber.

Easy Assembly

Operating on the same framework as a standard Lucas Mill, the Lucas Model 8 Slabber can be carried to the site of the log and assembled around it. With this method, no heavy equipment is necessary to move the log, as long as it is on stable, semi-flat ground. Assembling the mill takes only a few minutes. First, the two end frames that hold the rails are assembled (from four pieces) and propped upright using the telescoping brace. Once this has been done, each 20-foot rail can be placed on the uprights and locked into place using the cam lock. If necessary, an extension can be added to the end of each rail to saw timber of the desired length (in my case, 20 feet), or the stops can simply be bolted into place. The Lucas framework is raised and lowered using the winch and a chain mechanism integrated into each end frame.

Once the mill framework has

Below left to right: Wedges are inserted into the cut to prevent the chain and bar from pinching. A 50-in. wide maple fork awaits slabbing.



been assembled, the power head is simply wheeled into place between the rails, and the framework is raised vertically, catching the power head's rollers on the rails. Once the rails have been cranked high enough, the two removable wheels are taken off and the slabber is ready to roll back and forth on the rails and start milling.

I usually saw on a hard, level surface, but if I find myself on uneven ground, a level comes in handy to make sure that the uprights are parallel with one another. Whenever possible, I put down some 6 x 6 bunk timbers to get the logs up off the ground so I can cut all the way to the bottom of the log. But if that is not possible due to the size or location of the log, you can simply saw until the log has been reduced to a manageable size that permits it to be raised up off the ground.

Operation

The Lucas Slabber features a 66-



Above: Partway through slabbing a 37-in.-diameter red oak log. Below: The Lucas Model 8 Slabber utilizes a 66-in. saw bar and 190-link super skip ripping edge.

inch chain saw bar with a 190-drive-link ripping chain. The power comes from a 16-hp Briggs & Stratton engine that drives the chain via a clutch-engaged pulley and two v-belts. Lubrication for the chain is provided by a 1 quart oil jug with a shutoff valve and a small tube running to a notch ground into the chain saw bar's nose. Lucas Mill recommends engine oil instead of bar oil, as it is too thick to properly lubricate the chain in this application. Those who stare at



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COMPACT SPECIFICATIONS

- Trailer:** Tandem axle, 8'6" wide, 22'-30" long, 11'8" high, 5-7 tons, Electric brakes.
- Saw:** Superior Carbide Slasher - Cut wood instead of sharpen chains. 44" to 60" diameter, 2 ga Carbide Slasher.
- Engine:** 50 to 170 HP or PTO Drive with user's tractor.
- Hydraulics:** Commercial Shearing.
- Splitter:** 35 - 45 tons, 3-5 second cycle time; 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 & 21 way pkg wedge. Capacity: 4" to 27" Log diameter: 0" to 48" Block Length. Lifetime warranty on the entire splitter chamber.
- Infeed Conveyor:** 16" - 30" long. Hydraulic powered.
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Packaging wedge

Lucas Slabber Mill Model 8

the chain very long usually do a double take and comment on how it seems to be missing some teeth. That's because the Lucas Slabber utilizes an Oregon 27RX ripping chain that is a variant on the 27R ripping chain. Designed for use in high-horsepower applications like the Lucas Slabber, it is commonly referred to as a "super skip" due to the fact that there are five cutters missing between each pair.

The operation of the Lucas Slabber is relatively straightforward. First, adjust the rail height using the crank handle and depth gauge on each end frame to achieve the desired slab thickness. Turn on the bar oiler by cracking open the small, in-line valve. Start the engine, and pull back on the throttle bar to spin the chain for a few seconds and ensure it is well lubricated. Applying gentle pressure, operate the engine at full throttle and ease the spinning chain into the log until half the bar width is inside.

At this point the sawyer's pushing force can be increased until a happy medium is found between the cut speed and the governor on the engine. As the cut progresses into the log, wedges are inserted into the kerf to prevent the weight of the slab from pinching on the bar and chain. The Lucas Slabber is equipped with a splitter bar to help prevent pinching, but without wedges supporting the cut slab, it eventually becomes impossible to push. At the end of the cut, either the engine is stopped as soon as the chain cuts out of the log and the slab pinches it, or wedges are inserted on each side of the log. The slab is then lifted upward off the bar and chain so the slabber can be pushed out of the log. If the sawyer were to simply shove the mill through the end of the cut, the weight of the freshly cut slab would catch the chain on the back of the bar and quickly derail and possibly damage it.

It is not necessary to exert a lot of force to push the mill forward

ENGINE	16-hp Briggs & Stratton Vanguard (manual start)
CHAIN TYPE	404 pitch; skip tooth recommended for large hardwoods
TRANSPORT	Frame disassembles, fits in small pickup truck
MAX LOG DIAMETER	
• Standard model	60 in.
• Optional model	77 in.
• Super Slabber	110 in.
MAX LOG LENGTH	• Standard 19 ft. 6 in. • Optional 26 ft. 4 in.
SETWORKS	Manual
CARRIAGE FEED	Manual
LOG HANDLING	Manual

CONTACT INFO

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MANUFACTURER'S COMMENTS

The dedicated slabber is designed to cut wide bark-to-bark slabs. A Lucas Slabber can be purchased as a standalone mill like the Model 8 Dedicated Slabber, or it can be purchased as a bolt-on attachment to the Lucas Mill. For those who already own a Lucas Mill and the framework, it is possible to buy just the power head without the uprights and rails. In the United States Lucas Mills are sold exclusively by Bailey's.



Above: The bar and chain system is simple yet effective. Above right: The depth of cut is set by an accurate scale system. Lower right: The Lucas Slabber operates on the same trolley system as the Lucas Mill.



during a cut. Excessive force is generally a sign of a dull chain that needs to be sharpened or replaced. Chain replacement is straightforward, as the chain and belts are actually tensioned by the same mechanism. Simply loosen the tensioner until the chain can be unhooked from the drive sprocket and removed from the bar. Putting

on a new chain is just the same process in reverse. A chain that is 190 drive links long can be a challenge to reattach to the bar and sprocket, but I found the whole swap can be done in around five minutes or less. For speed, I own numerous chains and use a grinder to sharpen, but Lucas sells a sharpening jig that clips on the mill rails for those who prefer to hand file.

While the Lucas Slabber is certainly not a speed demon in terms of linear cutting speed, it is certainly not slow. One of the logs recently slabbed was an 8-foot-long, 37-inch-diameter red oak that was cut into 3-inch slabs. Scaling in at over 500 board feet, the entire log took an hour and a half to cut completely. On a previous occasion, when I slabbed the 19-foot, 35-inch-diameter white oak, the entire log was cut into 3-inch-thick slabs in under 3 hours.

One downside that is often mentioned is the larger kerf associated



The simple tension mechanism tightens both the v-belt and the chain.

with the 3/8 inch ripping chain. While this is true when slabbing smaller logs, this becomes less of a factor on wider slabs. Because of the rigid bar, very little dressing is required of the finished slabs. Only on very rare occasions have I had issues with cuts diving or climbing, and every time it was because I was trying to make just one more cut with a dull chain before swapping.

The 16-horsepower Briggs & Stratton engine does not come standard with electric start. While this

might not seem like an issue to those in warmer climates, on a cold winter day in Wisconsin, pull-starting a 16-hp engine can be a physical endeavor all its own. The engine is also equipped with a low emission carburetor to meet new emission standards. Because of this, adjustments on the carburetor are limited. Despite numerous trips to various small engine shops, mine has never ceased its annoying habit of randomly dying at idle, especially when cold. I have been told by

various mechanics this is due to the fact that the carburetor is jetted so low that it is constantly starved for fuel. This is also noticeable when spinning the engine up to full throttle. It tends to run blubbery and starved for fuel until the engine has reached full throttle.

While the bar oiler system does seem to do the job, I have always thought that the small 1 quart oil jug represents a cheap point in the mill. The shutoff valve tends to be finicky, either dumping too much

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oil on or not enough. Instead of a durable molded tank, it features a cheap 1 quart oil container that is typically thrown away after an oil change. It would also be nice to have a larger container that does not need to be filled constantly.

One useful trick I have discovered is to use water in conjunction with the chain oiler to keep the bar cool while cutting. I keep a 1 gallon

jug of water on top of the slab as I am cutting. As I progress through the log, I periodically pour a little bit on the cutting bar on either side of the log. It has demonstrated a remarkable ability to keep the temperature of the cutting bar and chain at an acceptable level, and in turn, has managed to lengthen the time between sharpening to one or two more cuts per log. Because of the

uncommon type of chain used, it is typically not sold by local suppliers and tends to be more expensive.

The Lucas Slabber is a versatile machine that fills a void and achieves what it set out to do: cut exceptionally wide slabs with a portable sawmill. While it is not without its faults, they are minor and do not inhibit the ability of the machine to accomplish its main objective. All in all, for those looking to cut wide slabs without the use of very heavy equipment, the Lucas Model 8 Slabber may fit the bill. ■

As a self-described "sawdust addict," J.R. Salzman is both an avid sawyer and woodworker. He is a longtime competitor in professional lumberjack sports, winning eight Men's Professional Log Rolling world titles, and the 2005 ESPY Award for Best Outdoor Sports Athlete. He operates his portable sawmill on a regular basis and has a BS in Technology Education.

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