

Hud-Son's HFE-21 HOMESTEADER BAND MILL

After enduring a 30 year lust, I bought a band saw mill, Hud-Son's Little Oscar 118, a hobbyist's mill, just what I needed to saw occasional logs from firewood trees and cut something for my shop.

Unfortunately, some of my logs were too large for the Hud-son mill, so when an opportunity arose to get their new Homesteader, I did, and the new mill took a 20-inch elm log I cut last winter. It is a major improvement over my previous mill, with all controls on the operator's side of the mill and a lube tank for lubricating the blade when sawing resinous woods.

Being a "pusher" mill, the Homesteader is not a production tool, which is fine with me, but more power would help with large

logs. It has a 21-inch log capacity and its 6.5-hp gasoline engine has cut 16-inch cherry and 20-inch elm logs. Since the operator pushes the mill through the log (Figure 1), it is easy to slow down for large knots and to speed up as the log width decreases. As the maximum size log that can be secured with the dogs is about 15 inches, larger logs must be secured with a "cheater" (Figure 2).

Although I did not anticipate much custom sawing, most of my work has been for someone else. A cabinetmaker friend needed some

4 x 4 cherry for turning stock and helped me run the mill while he decided how to cut the logs. Another wanted cedar timbers for raised garden beds. And for my own cabinet stock, I saw short sections out of trees that would otherwise go into the firewood pile. In order to saw sections as short as 4 feet, the first two dogs must be spaced to hold short logs.

Each log is an individual challenge, and as I open it up, I can saw to maximize unusual



Fig. 2. The mill setup with cheaters in a 20-inch elm log.



Fig. 3. With the mill elevated and both dogs raised, it is easy to turn logs on the track to find the best opening face.

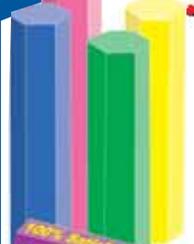


Fig. 1. Photo of operator pushing the mill through a pine log. Note all the controls and adjustments are readily accessible.

grain or sizes for projects in my wood shop or for other woodworkers. I've even tried some bias cuts to make plaques and signs. In addition to meeting my needs for lumber, it is producing unexpected income, probably enough to pay off its affordable price. My band-sawn boards require a minimum of planing, so 4/4 can actually be 7/8 of an inch—that means an extra board out of an 8-inch cant. And the sawn surface is so smooth that I can laminate 1-1/2 x 1/2 laths together for greenhouse arches without planing them.

My track is mounted on a raised platform using 2 x 6 spruce L-girders for longitudinal support (Figure 3), and with both dogs raised, it is easy to turn logs to find the opening face. Unlike my 118, with welded, 6-foot track sections, the HFE-21 has 4-foot tracks that bolt together. This makes for cheaper shipping, but alignment and leveling are more time-consuming, and I must constantly check the track for

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Bed length.....	2, 6-ft. track sections bolted together
Band wheel diameter	16 in.
Band wheel surface.....	polypropylene belting
Band	1-1/4 in. Hud-Son band blade
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level. The solution to this is to place (or weld) a long square steel tube under all the cross members.

I set up the mill as Hud-Son recommends, with the moveable dogs on the operator's side of the track, but after sawing about a dozen logs, switched the track to place the fixed dog on the operator's side. This enabled me to pull the log to me when dogging—easier than pushing—and once I slab a log and turn it, the blade enters clean wood. But, lacking the muscle to turn my 20-inch elm, I sawed it to the middle, then turned it, and learned why the moveable dogs go on the operator's side. (1) Stops on the track cross members hold cants, but the blade guide on the off-side is about 3 inches in toward the center. With stops on the operator's side, there are only 17 inches of clearance between the stop and the guide. (2) With the fixed guide on the off-side, the wood being sawn is closer to the blade guide, with less chance for the blade to wander. If all else fails, follow the directions—so I switched it back.

The dogs caused several problems on small (6-inch) logs:

- the fixed dog slips off rounded log sides,
- the moveable dog point has considerable play; when edging boards or sawing small logs or cants, the dog pressure caused twist and the sawn surfaces were not square.

Figure 4 shows my changes to the dog assembly. A nail welded to the top of the fixed dog projects out about 1/8 inch and enables me to dog larger logs, as the point can dig

into the underside of a round log (Figure 5). On the moveable dog, the offset point was removed and welded atop the vertical post to reduce twisting of small logs and cants. To minimize chances of hitting the dog when sawing 1 inch above the track, the end of a projecting bolt was ground off and the offset clamp handle was straightened. The only other problem I encountered was slippage of the clutch. It is possible for oil and debris to get into the clutch, so a spray can of brake

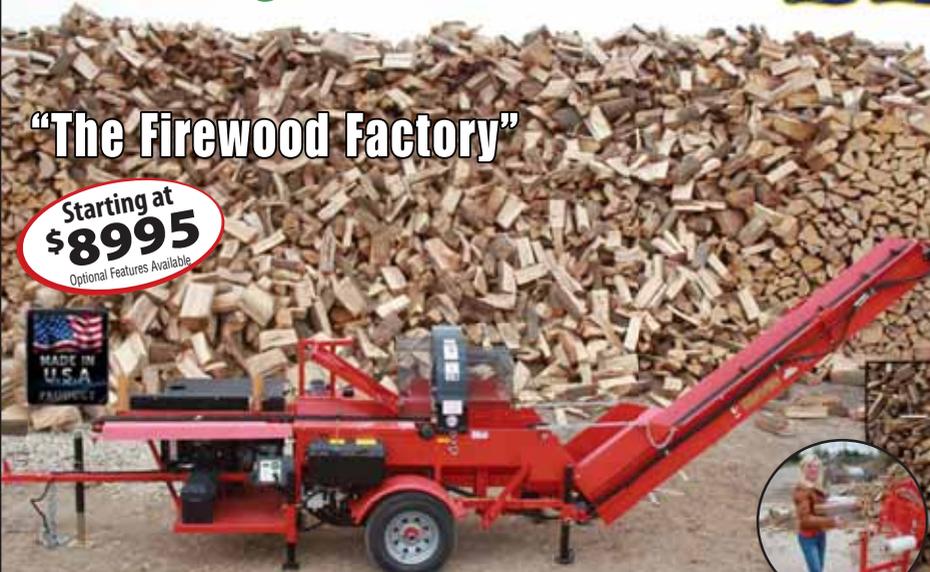
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SAWMILL REVIEW

cleaner is nice to have handy in the event that happens.

With band wheels only 16 inches in diameter, there is quite a bit of stress on blades compared with the 19-inch wheels on larger saws. Hud-Son recommends using a torque wrench with 30 to 35 pounds of torque to tension blades, so I torque to the lower range to extend blade life and always detension the blades when finished sawing.

Clean logs are a must to extend

blade life. I keep mine clean by forwarding them to the mill deck with a Logrite ATV arch and drop them onto wooden stringers. Any extraneous dirt is removed with a long-handled barbecue cleaning brush. Eventually I hope to get water to my mill, and electricity so I can clean logs and clean the track with a shop vac. It is essential to keep the track clean, especially when sawing resinous woods. Resinous sawdust can build up on track rails and in the carriage wheel

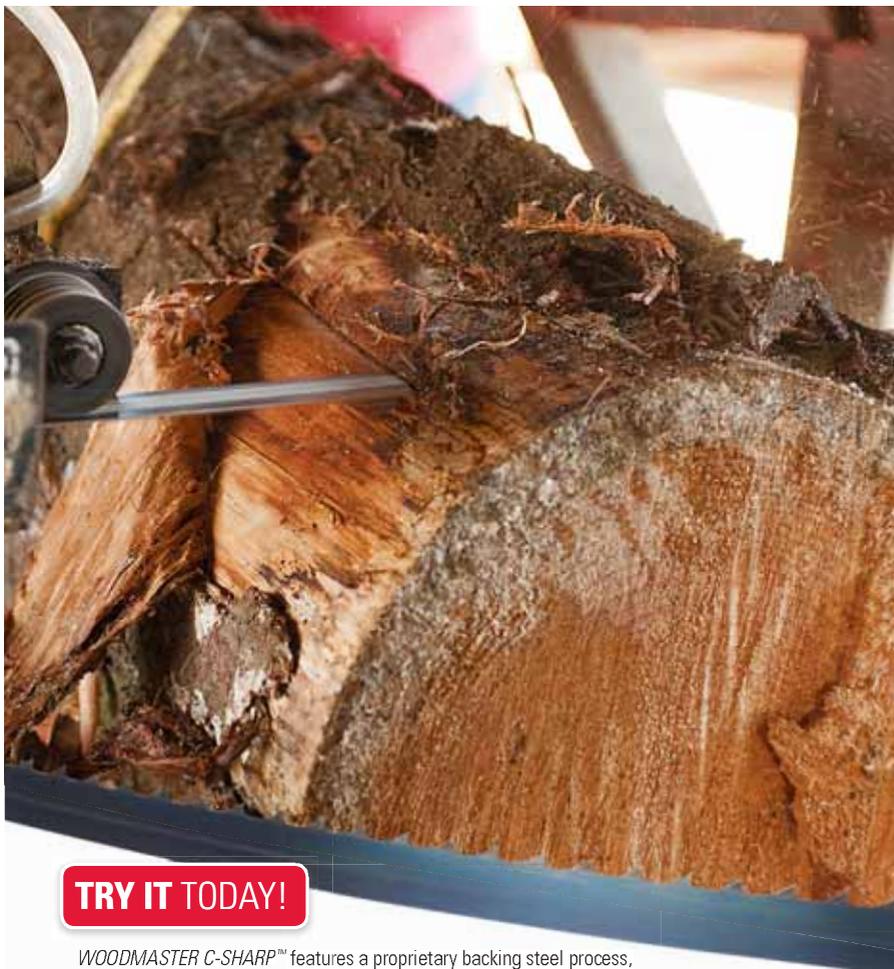


Fig. 4. Modified dogs. The fixed dog (left) has a projecting 1/8-in. point at top while the moveable dog (right) has had the offset point moved to the top of the vertical post.



Fig. 5. With a point welded on the fixed dog, it can dig into the underside of a log surface and hold it firmly.

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grooves, causing the head to wobble and the saw blade to cut unevenly.

There is no waste from my mill. The sawdust goes to two neighbors for chicken bedding and the slabs go into one of Eric Ellis's cutting cribs to be cut to 16-inch lengths for my shop stove and kitchen cookstove. Instead of buying slabs from a mill down the road, I now have more than enough and sell the excess.

Now with gasoline prices much higher than \$0.17/gallon when I bought my first car, I am happy with my fuel-stingy 6.5-hp sawmill, though more horsepower would help on large logs. In a permanent setup such as mine, the only improvement would be electric power. Pushing is no problem and is helpful when problems develop. All things considered, I'd give the HFE-21 about 10 thumbs-up. ■

Ben Hoffman is a forester with 28 years experience in state, federal, and private (including two years as a private logging contractor) forestry and 17 years in academia. Ben is retired as a Maine Licensed Forester, and Vermont Land Surveyor. He may be reached at ben@mainestream.us.

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