

SAWMILL FORUM

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Old habits are as hard to break as the old myths that fed them. Or to almost paraphrase an old Tina Turner song, “What’s Lead Got to do with It?”

Of all of the things there are in your mill to adjust to keep your saw running properly, lead is not the one you want to mess with. Yes, it is important to have a proper amount of lead so that you are cutting with the front of your circular saw on the downswing and not cutting with the back of it on the upswing. But once you have what is considered to be a normal amount of lead (one to three thirty-seconds of an inch), leave it alone. It is not meant to be a fine tuning type of adjustment, nor is it meant to be something that should even affect how the saw performs as long as you have a normal amount of it.

If your lead is adequate, don’t think of it as a way to steer the saw, or as a way to correct some other problem with the mill. Just keep your hands off of it and leave it alone.

It used to be that people believed that the job of lead was to counteract some perceived natural tendency of the saw to run out of the log. *Wrong!* It is just there so that you are cutting with one area of the saw at a time, and preferably the front of the saw as it turns down into the log, while driving the log down onto the carriage instead of trying to lift it up with the back of the saw.

That old myth also went that if the saw heats at the eye, you don’t have enough lead, and if it heats at the rim, you have too much lead. *Wrong again!* It is true that if you have way too much lead, the saw will tend to heat at the rim, but if your lead is within a running tolerance and your saw heats at the rim, you need to look elsewhere and keep your hands off the lead adjustment.

To this day I get people who try to tell me that the lead is there so that the log clears the eye or body of the saw. More misinformation. Saw kerf is what makes it so that the log clears the eye and body of the saw, pure and simple.

I still get calls from sawyers who tell me that the saw was scrubbing the log on the gig back, so they gave it a little more lead. *Wrong answer!* The saw scrubbing the log on the gig back has absolutely nothing to do with the lead. The reason the saw is scrubbing is that your saw ran out of the log, most likely because you didn’t sharpen the teeth accurately, so the high corner on the board side pulled the saw in that direction. As it exited the cut, there was no longer anything to pull it in that direction so it stood straight back up again. Only one problem: When the saw was running out, it essentially cut the wrong path, leaving too much wood on the log. Now when you gig back, it is rubbing the wood that would have been removed if the saw had run true. That is not a function of your lead adjustment.

I am not that old, but I remember the days, especially with old hand set mills, when you might find yourself adjusting the lead on a regular basis. That was part of the so called art of making one of those mills run. As usual, the saw was either running in or running out of the log. And of course it was pretty common for it to be heating. So you felt the saw to see where the heat was and then adjusted the lead accordingly. If you were a true believer in using the lead adjustment as one of your major tools for making good lumber, it was quite common after a while to find yourself running up to a half an inch of lead. Of course the end result was that you could possibly make some acceptable lumber that way, but if you had just bothered to learn how to sharpen the saw properly, or find someone to hammer the saw properly, you could have easily just left the lead alone and gotten much better results. If your pickup truck starts pulling to the left, you don’t correct it by putting larger diameter tires on the left side. No, you get it aligned properly before you ruin a set of tires.

The lead is not meant to be a fine tuner, or as a means to counteract or cover up some other glaring problem. And if the saw scrubs the log on the way back, that is just one more sign that the saw ran out of the cut and you need to do something about it other than adjusting the lead.



Sharpening a saw with a Jockey-style grinder.

To paraphrase Ron Popeil of infomercial fame, if your lead is anywhere between one and three thirty-seconds, "set it and forget it." Now go out there and get your collars resurfaced and make sure you are really sharpening the saw accurately.

Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.

The author is a saw doctor and president of Seneca Saw Works, Inc., P.O. Box 681, Burdett, NY 14818, tel. (607) 546-5887, email casey@senecasaw.com.

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1. fill out student eligibility verification sections of application form (form can be found on the northernlogger.com website or received through the NELA office)
2. submit to NELA office with copy of student's current completed FAFSA and one document verifying school acceptance or enrollment. **Deadline: March 31, 2010**



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