



BY CASEY CREAMER

I had a customer bring me a saw to be hammered and what transpired was something that happens every now and then. As many of you know, I hammer saws while the customer waits with the saw, or saws, on a regular basis. That not only saves the customer a trip, but it also gives me a chance to communicate with the customer as I am working on the saw. That communication can at times be very useful to both of us. I get to compare what the saw is telling me with what the sawyer is telling me about what trouble he was having with that particular saw. And the customer often gets a few hints about how to make better use of the saw. There are times when I might ask, "Which blind idiot sharpened this saw?!" That is one of my more subtle ways of pointing out that the teeth may have been slightly mis-sharpened.

Anyway, this was one of those occasions when the symptoms didn't line up with what the saw looked like. When that happens it is of the utmost importance that I communicate that to the sawyer, mill manager, mill owner, or whoever is going to take the lead on the troubleshooting process that will follow.

In this particular case the sawyer who brought the saw reported that the saw was running in like crazy. He said it was running in at least a half inch on an eight foot log. Experience tells me that when a saw abruptly runs in a large amount, it is upsetting enough to the sawyer that they will unintentionally tend to exaggerate the measurement. So I will often arbitrarily cut that number in half. Well, running in towards the log a quarter of an inch is still a pretty severe symptom.

After cleaning the saw and doing my initial assessment of what shape the saw was in, I noticed that it really didn't match the symptoms, although it was at least off in the right direction to line up with the stated symptom.

Generally a saw that is dished towards the board side will run out of the log and a saw that is dished towards the log side will run into the log. And the severity of the amount of dish (bend) will be directly proportional to the severity of the symptom. There are times when a saw will be badly dished towards the board side, but the reported symptom is that it is running in, or badly dished towards the log side, yet running out of the log. In those cases it is important that I get to communicate with the sawyer because if I just fix the saw without saying anything, their symptoms will undoubtedly get worse. And there is always the possibility that they know which way the saw is running but they are mixing up how to refer to it.

In these cases the first thing I do is make sure the sawyer and I are on the same page as to which direction in is and which direction out is.

In this case, the saw was dished to the log and the saw was running into the log, so one might think all was right with the world and all I had to do was straighten up the saw and all of the problems would go away. Well, life as a Saw Doctor isn't always quite that simple.

This saw was just slightly dished towards the log, not severely dished. Yet the symptoms were of a saw that was severely running into the log. I also noticed that the saw was just a little low on tension (stretch). And this was during the late fall cold snap that happened in the northeast this year.

I came to the conclusion that the severe running in problem was the result of a combination of a number of small problems. The fact that the saw was slightly dished towards the log side, would cause the saw to run in a little. The fact that the saw was just a little low on tension would give the saw a tendency to not be able to stand up to a proper feed rate. That would cause it to run off line in either direction, but since the saw was slightly dished, that direction was predetermined. In addition the logs were partially frozen. And since it was the outside of the logs that were frozen instead of the inside, this would also give the saw a tendency to follow the path of least resistance which would be to run in towards the softer unfrozen center of the log.

And just to add a little more, I discovered during the communication process that the spreader bar was slightly misaligned, which allowed the board to slightly heat the board side of the saw, which would make that side expand a little from the warmth, which would then make the saw dish a little more towards the log side. Which of course would give it that much more tendency to run in towards the log side. Additionally, the sawyer reported that they were running about an eighth of an inch of lead which is not only way too much, but would also tend to coax the saw to run in instead of straight.

So, when you add up all of those things that were just slightly off, it is pretty easy to see how the cumulative effect can be quite severe.

Questions about sawmills and their operation can be sent to Casey Creamer, saw doctor and president of Seneca Saw Works, Inc., PO Box 681, Burdett, NY 14818, (607) 546-5887. You can also reach out by email: casey@senecasaw.com.

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