

# SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY  
CREAMER

SAW  
DOCTOR



## How long have you been hammering saws?

People have been asking me that question for 36 years now. And for the past 36 years I have always felt just a little uncomfortable about having to provide an answer.

Of course, during the early years of my career, I didn't like the idea of potential customers trying to judge me based solely on how many years I had been trying to learn how to hammer circular saws. But even now that I have many years under my belt, I still don't like the idea of people thinking that the number years you have been at it actually has much to do with your experience and hence your competency--or lack thereof.

Yes you want to find someone who has plenty of saw hammering experience to work on your saws, but what does plenty of experience actually mean? I don't think experience can be measured in years. And I don't think you can measure experience by just counting how many saws you have hammered either.



As in racing, competence comes from what you learn, not how long it took to learn it.

Real experience happens when you are trying to find a better way to do whatever it is that you do. As a hobby I do a little bit of road racing and I have learned to limit my practice time because it seems that I just put in lap after lap of not necessarily driving the ideal racing line. Seat time is helpful, but how much do you learn or improve by just putting in lap after lap after lap?

When I am actually racing, I am constantly learning as I pay attention to what other drivers are doing right and wrong and trying to apply that to what I am doing based on what equipment I have to work with. And of course I can easily measure my success or lack thereof based on my position. And there are times when people ask me how long I have been racing, as if to imply that the more years you have been doing it, the better you are.

Let's get back to saw hammering. One of the problems is that for many years there has been a tradition of saw doctors keeping what they do and how they do it a big stupid secret. That secret did nobody any good. Because people were not privy to the information they needed to properly learn the trade, they resorted to trying to figure out saw hammering on their own. Some were able to get it while others made it up as they went along and in some cases got it entirely wrong. Imagine having 50 years of experience doing it wrong.

Now you might ask if they were doing it wrong, how could they stay in business for so long? Going back to that theme of keeping it a secret, the sawyers and mill managers or mill owners often didn't really know if their saws were being hammered

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properly or not. Maybe they were able to make acceptable lumber, but did they have to wrongly adjust the mill to compensate for a saw that was not properly hammered? Or maybe their production was lower than it should have been because they had to baby the saw to make it work at all. And if they had never had a properly hammered saw, maybe this was all they knew so they assumed that is how saws work.

It is my contention that if saw doctors had been more willing to share their knowledge, the people using the saws would have been able to know what a properly hammered saw looks like and acts like. Then if there were some problems it would have been a lot easier to figure out if the saw needed to be hammered or the mill needed to be adjusted.

I was lucky enough 36 years ago in that I managed to find just a few saw doctors who were willing to go against tradition and share their secrets with me. And as a result I have always felt the responsibility to do my part in sharing my experiences with anyone who is willing to listen or read.

When you ask how much experience someone has by asking how long they have been doing what they do, you are really trying to determine their competence. A much better way to determine that is to ask if you can watch while they hammer your saw. And while you are watching, ask them why they are doing whatever it is that they are doing to your saw at the moment. You will know right away how competent they are based on what you observe and based on how they answer your questions.

Sometimes the big secret was more about not wanting you to know that they didn't really know then not wanting you to know what they did know.

**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.**

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