

SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY
CREAMER

SAW
DOCTOR



I was hammering a saw today that was just weird enough that I thought I should share the experience with *Northern Logger* readers.

Part of my job as a saw doctor, when I am not out troubleshooting mills or training budding saw doctors of the future, is to hammer saws. What does that mean? In the simplest of terms, the goal when hammering a saw is to undo the last thing that happened to it. After a number of years of experience, it's usually easy to see what went wrong at the mill by inspecting the saw. Fixing it then boils down to reversing whatever happened to it.

Since it is my job to counteract whatever happened to the saw last, the first thing I do after thoroughly cleaning it is to try to determine the last thing that occurred. Sometimes the answer to that question is obvious, like when a huge set was made while still in the cut. Other times you have to dig a bit deeper and may conclude that you might never know exactly what happened.

In this case I was looking at a saw that appeared to have been hammered improperly. That's never good news. I find it a lot easier to correct a problem caused at the mill, than to undo what someone else did with a hammer. There are only a few things that can happen in the production environment, and I suspect I have already seen most of them. There are subtle problems caused by things like running a saw that has been mis-sharpened and ran in or out as a result. And then there are the saws that have had massive accidents. Their problems tend to be quite a bit more obvious. And of course, I see plenty of saws that had a sliver fall off the log and become wedged between the saw and the offbearer. I never want to say—or even think—that I have seen it all, but in all of these years I certainly have seen most of the ways that a mill can mess up a saw.

But when I am looking at a saw whose only problem is that the last person who hammered it did it incorrectly, fixing it can be an interesting challenge. Sometimes it's easy to figure out exactly what the last person with a hammer did, espe-

cially if it is someone whose work you are familiar with. But sometimes you get a saw where you just can't imagine what the last person was even trying to do, let alone figure exactly what he did so that you can start to undo it.

In the case of this saw, it had definitely been hammered wrong, but I didn't really know the whole story until I got a lot deeper into fixing it.

As I managed to pretty much undo whatever had been done to it before, I discovered an interesting underlying problem that was not at all visible when I first inspected the saw.

This saw had apparently been set while in the cut, but the last person to work on it did not address that problem directly. That means that he went ahead and tried to hammer the saw without doing the main thing that you are supposed to do when you hammer a saw. Remember that I said your job is to counteract whatever happened to the saw last.

Once I undid the last hammering job, it became painfully clear to me that rather than counteract the severe bend at the collar line from being set while in the cut, this person tried to compensate rather than counteract. So instead of fixing the problem directly, he hammered other places in the saw to eventually hide or sort of cover up the initial problem. I assume that didn't work very well, which is why the saw was now in my shop.

I don't know whether the last hammerman was aware of the problem and purposely tried to compensate for it instead of correcting it, or if he didn't even notice the real problem and just went ahead and tried to get the saw to look the way he thought it should look. By the way, regardless of what the previous hammerman may have thought the saw should look like, a saw dished towards the log side is not what we should be aiming for. Even if it covers up a problem, it still won't saw properly.

After fully undoing what the last guy did, I of course went after the underlying problem. Now the saw is hammered correctly

and should have no trouble getting back into what it is supposed to be doing, which is making accurate lumber.

Of course, it's not all drudgery. Sometimes there are a few laughs in saw doctoring. One of my customers would ship me a saw in a crate, with the words "I'm off to see the wizard" printed on the board that holds the saw in place. And when I'd remove the board to take the saw out of the crate, it would say, "put me in coach, I'm ready to play" on the other side of the board I always got a kick out of that.

As I was fixing this saw I was imagining what it would be like to repair a house that had been built on a crooked foundation by someone who was good enough to compensate for the out of level foundation, but not good enough to realize that they should really straighten out the foundation before trying to build the rest of the house.

Fixing this saw was a lot of extra work, but it was a unique challenge and almost a bit of professional fun as a result.

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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