

# “Owner’s Report” On Do-It-Yourself Sawmills

Long-time FARM SHOW readers are familiar with Bill Reeks of Cromwell, Ky., creator of the do-it-yourself bandsaw mill. He built his first sawmill for less than \$100, running the bandsaw blade around a pair of auto tires. We first featured Bill’s machine six years ago. Since then, he’s sent out more than 4,000 packets of information to interested sawmillers and figures that more than half those went on to build their own sawmills.

We tracked down some of these bandsaw builders to see if they’re satisfied with their “made it myself” mills and to find out what they’re doing with them.

Bill is “notorious” for his ultra-personal customer service. His “packets” of information contain hundreds of photos and detailed information. And Bill is always available to help anyone who “gets stuck” along the way.

For an introductory packet about both of his bandsaw mills, you can send \$3.00 in the U.S. or \$4.00 in Canada (U.S. funds only). Complete information packets sell for \$48.50 in U.S. funds only (add \$2.50 in Canada). Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bill Reeks, Yellow-Jak-It, 7104 U.S. Hwy 231, Cromwell, Ky. 42333 (ph 270 274-3361).

Here’s how our story shaped up:

**Jerry Baker, Boaz, Ala.:** “I’ve cut a lot of logs with it and it has done a great job,” says Baker, who’s building a new home with his bandsaw mill. He used 13-in. wheels and a 13 hp vertical shaft engine salvaged from a Cub Cadet garden tractor.



“I use it to saw pine trees averaging 8 to 10 in. in diameter. Some of them are up to 14 ft. long. It cuts the boards so smooth I don’t even have to plane them.

“I basically followed Reeks’ plans, but as I was building the machine I would look it over and try to come up with something better. The main improvement I made is how I raise the platform up or down so the blade always stays true, which results in an entire board with even thickness. Whenever I turn the handle, the blade stays good and tight wherever I put it. As a result, I can cut as thin as 1/8-in. thick. Reeks has his blade-carrying platform attached to a cable and you can’t move it just a little, you have to move it a lot. I run threaded bolts into nuts that I welded onto the frame and put a handle on top. A chain goes from one side to the other so both sides turn together.

“I’ve found that it’s very important to keep the correct air pressure in the tires in order to maintain an even board thickness. If I did it over I’d use a horizontal shaft engine so I could use a straight belt. With my vertical shaft engine I have to twist the belt so it doesn’t run as smooth and also wears more.

“I spent only about \$400 to build my mill.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jerry Baker, 84 Bluff Dr., Boaz, Ala. 35957 (ph 256 593-5655).

**E.T. Ash, College Station, Texas:** He’s happy with his bandsaw mill.

“I built it at a friend’s junk yard and used a few parts from his ‘inventory’. I used the frame of a hydraulic press and 20-ft. lengths of angle iron. I had to go through a half dozen tires to find one that was straight enough to run true. I ended up using 14-in. Mazda car tires.

“A 7 1/2 hp electric motor drives the blade. I built and wired the starter with a friend’s help and added a 24-volt DC circuit to ener-



gize the starter and to power a 24-volt motor that drives the head up and down. I push the head down the track manually, although eventually I plan to use the same type of DC motor to propel the carriage. I modeled the blade guides on a Wood Mizer unit. I plan to use the wood I cut to build some small timber-framed houses.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, E.T. Ash, 6690 River Oaks Drive, College Station, Texas 77845 (ph 979 690-1761).

**John Anderson, Wilmot, S. Dak.:** He uses his bandsaw mill to cut logs from 32 to 36 in. in diameter and up to 22 ft. long.

“It works great. I used most of Reeks’ plans but made some modifications. I used 4 by 3-in. angle irons to make the main frame. My mill sets on the rear axle from a junked-out front wheel drive car. The steering wheel off a riding mower is used to raise or lower the platform. I used my mill last year to cut cottonwood trees that had died after being flooded out. A lot of people say cottonwoods don’t make good lumber, but I found that if cottonwood is dried out properly it can make great lumber. I made a lot of 2 by 12 cotton-



wood planks for my neighbor, who used them to build a cattle shed. Now I’m using the mill to make pallets for a local company. I’m also cutting lumber for a 2-stall garage that I plan to build.

“To raise or lower the platform, Reeks uses a commercial screw rod that’s heavier than what I could find locally. I ended up using a



**Glen and Craig Phelps, North Platte, Neb.:** They’ve had some problems keeping an even board thickness with bandsaw mill they built.

“The blade tends to work up and down a little so that if we’re cutting a board it might be 2 1/2 in. thick on one end and 1 1/2 inches thick at the other end. We don’t know why this happens. We’ve been using it on Chi-

nese elm, which cuts hard. We’ve used the boards we’ve made to make a corral and also some gates. They’re too uneven for anything else. Perhaps there’s a problem with the tires the blade runs on, but we haven’t been able to correct it.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Glen and Craig Phelps, HCR 35, Box 151, North Platte, Neb. 69101 (ph 308 532-0229).

6-ft. long threaded rod that’s connected to a wheel. Each turn of the wheel raises the cutting blade 1/10 in., so to cut a 1-in. thick board I just turn the crank 10 times. It’s very easy to use.



“I was using a 1 1/4-in. wide blade but it broke too often so I switched to a 1 1/2-in. wide blade which has solved the problem. The blade stretches around a pair of 13-in. spare car tires, which are protected by a fender off a tandem axle horse trailer. I started out with a 12 hp motor but switched to a 16 hp Wisconsin engine for more power. I manually turn the logs over, and with big logs I have to use a floor jack to do the job. I may build a chain-driven log turner into the unit that will automatically turn the log over.”

Anderson says his total cost to build the mill was about \$600.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, John A. Anderson, 810 6th Ave. West, Wilmot, S. Dak. 57279 (ph 605 938-4559).

**T.E. “Gene” Salsman, Richmond, Ky.:**

“It’s a handy, economical gadget to have,” says Salsman, who used a 20-ft. long section of school bus frame for the base of his mill. He mounted a pair of 2-in., 3/8-in. thick angle irons on the frame to form the track. The machine rides on the rear axle off a Chevy Citation front wheel drive car. By removing the wheels, Salsman can lower the track to the ground, allowing logs to be easily loaded onto log rests for sawing.

“I’ve used it to make about 1,000 board feet of walnut lumber and also have cut ash and black locust wood. It took me all winter to build it but it was worth the effort. I built my mill without plans, using trial and error, after visiting Bill Reeks in Kentucky and adapting some of his ideas as well as those of other commercial mills. I used a 10 hp Briggs & Stratton engine which I bought used for \$125. My mill can handle logs up to 28 in. in diameter and 16 1/2 ft. long. I use a 14-ft. long blade whereas Reeks uses a 13-ft. blade. Slotted mounts allow me to vary blade length by up to 8 in. I use a pair of threaded rods to tilt the wheels so they stay perfectly aligned and keep the blade centered.

“I use a 3/8-in. Dremel stone on a chainsaw sharpener to manually sharpen the blade, but I plan to build an automatic blade sharpener. I mounted a trailer ball coupler on front of the machine so I can move it around.

“The blade runs around skinny car spare

## Where To Find A Used Sawmill

You’ll find hundreds of used sawmills of all kinds at this online Website that specializes in portable sawmills.

Sawmill Exchange lists hundreds of mills including low-end manual band sawmills, automatic band sawmills, hydraulic mills, one and two-man circular sawmills, and so on. All mills listed are for sale by private owners. Sawmill Exchange can put you in touch with the individual owners so you can ask detailed questions about the saw’s history.

Sawmill Exchange also has the best list we’ve seen of portable sawmill manufacturers, including about 50 manufacturers and distributors of portable band sawmills and about 25 manufacturers of portable circular saw mills.

Just go to the Website at: [www.SawmillExchange.com](http://www.SawmillExchange.com) or call the company at 800 459-2148 or 205 661-9821; fax 205 661-9811.