

The Scaler's *perspective*

AN OFFICIAL'S POINT OF VIEW *by Skip Mourglia*

I'd arrived with expectations of a site similar to the one in South Carolina, the location of the previous SAWLEX. I loved watching the logging equipment working in the background in South Carolina, as though it was setting up the story for what would happen next to those logs. The weather cooperated there.

This year's event reminded me of trips to the Denver area where it rains every afternoon. My cheap Wal-Mart raincoat worked well for the first bucket of rain, but not for the tidal waves that followed. We trudged around the muck and mud like the hardy breed we woods people descend from. My ancestor John Hansen, president of the First Continental Congress, would have been proud of everyone's on-with-the-show attitude. When life gives you mud, make pies!

As we surveyed our mountains of supplied logs on day one, we saw our first challenge—the rock- and mud-encrusted sawlogs. During my stint as a log scaler in southern Illinois, between the arrival of log loads, I'd grab the hose and spend hours washing rock and mud from logs before they went onto the sawing deck (I know you are laughing economically, but I made \$5.50/hour). No sawyer would be happy running their blades

through that. Dave Boyt used some of his famous schmooz-talking magic and got an exhibitor to agree to debark all the sawlogs. That took care of most of the wane defect on cut lumber!

The hours spent transporting logs to the debarker, from the debarker, to this pile, and to that one, caused gouges in the sapwood



This was my second SAWLEX event, and I was as excited as the squirrel I found in my BBQ grill last week. (No, I didn't eat it.)

on many of the logs. I winced every time I speared a log like finger food on a toothpick. On the final day before the show's start, it became a challenge to find an unoccupied skid steer to move logs or pallets or equipment. Finding a skid steer unmanned, with keys dangling in the ignition, was like finding a secret stash of chocolate. Forget the pit stop. If you left that skid steer for nature's call, it was gone from your life forever.

At the pre-show meeting of sawyers I explained that this year's lumber was to be cut 1-1/8 inches thick to make it more attractive for the various buyers of lumber lots. The hope was that this would glean more money from the sale of lumber lots for the Log-A-Load charity.

Many sawyers came prepared to cut nominal 1-inch lumber, so they had to reset their guides.

The lumber could be under by 1/16 inch and over by 1/8 inch in thickness. Deviation from that range caused a board to be thrown out of the "accepted" tally. Board widths of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12 inches were accepted. Boards had to be within 1/16 inch of the next whole number to be rounded up in width. For instance, a 4-15/16-inch board was rounded up to a 5-inch board.

Wane could be no more than 1/2 the total width, 1/4 the total length, or 1/2 the thickness. Wavy boards or boards with other imperfections were penciled back to the minimum acceptable length of 6 feet, when possible.

Day One—Manual Mills

The six mills demonstrating on Friday, day one of the Shoot-Out, were manual mills. They were the Baker 18HD, EZ Boardwalk, Logosol, Norwood 2000, Wood-Mizer LT15, and Wood-Mizer LT28. When the mills finished cutting their logs, it was my duty to tally their lumber according to the above parameters. The boards came off so fast and furious it was not possible for me to tally while a mill was cutting. The Wood-Mizer LT28 was the only mill without miscut lumber deductions. I've

found that miscuts are more a product of an operator who is less experienced or who has interpreted the measuring parameters incorrectly. I would have been happy owning any of these mills! The last mill I tallied that day was the Logosol, and their lumber pile kept disappearing. It had been taken down to the "Lumber for Sale" area and had to be brought back to the Shoot-Out area. The skid steer operator must have thought I was speedy beyond belief, because he took the pile away, AGAIN, before I could scale it, and it had to

be searched for a second time. I think we're going to nickname that person little Mr. Efficiency!

Day Two—Hydraulic Mills

The seven mills demonstrating on Saturday, day two, were hydraulic mills and manual swing-blade mills. They were the Hudson, Baker Blue Streak, Wood-Mizer LT50, Wood-Mizer LT70, Mobile Dimensions, and Lucas and Peterson swingblade mills.

David and Chris, who manned

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the Lucas and Peterson mills, don't have an ounce of fat between them, and I think I actually saw them sweat this year. The ability to edge boards on the back-pass of the swingblade mills is one of their unique characteristics. The Mobile Dimensions mill also includes edging in its design. Again, I'd be happy to bring any of these mills into my forest for a lumberfest.

I can blame Saturday's comedy of errors on the wind. I was tallying the LT50 on my Rite in the Rain waterproof notebook and didn't notice when the wind flipped my page to the LT70 sheet. At some point, I discovered I was tallying on the LT70 page, and had to redo all of LT50's boards. You can only go so fast on this lumber-tallying gig. I'm a stickler for accuracy when it matters. Every mill had at least one miscut board, and one mill had lots of miscuts because the operator set the saw for 1-1/4 inches, assuming the kerf would keep it within the limits (Not!).

Practical Gifts

My favorite part of this whole experience is talking with the exhibitors and getting to see all the variety and differences between designs and options. It's more than I can digest while I'm there. It helps me back home when I'm working with landowners who own a mill or want to buy a mill. They mistakenly think I know what I'm talking about, but really all I'm doing is heading them in the right direction for detailed information. I'm still taking baby steps when it comes to all this mechanical equipment. My husband, Rex, can design and weld anything. He'll be psyched about some new design for a wood trailer he's built that hauls our 24-inch Hardy wood burner bolts. I am interested, but truly, he's lost me by the second sentence. You have to have a knack for mechanics to really GET IT. I have knacks for things like picking out crop trees in a forest, analyzing forest quality on the fly, cooking, canning, canoeing, and building the campfire.

Mechanics, for me, is much harder than learning Spanish...but I'm gaining some every year. I DO sharpen my own chain saw, with the help of this awesome tool that attaches to my SUV battery. I hit a lot of Ozark rocks cutting up storm debris on the forest floor. My chain supplier thinks I'm giving all these chains away as gifts. I never actually told him that, but the last time I bought five chains, he asked me if it was someone's birthday. He knows that Rex and I have bought each other chain saws for our last birthdays. I really like practical gifts. I don't have to dust a chain saw. ■

Skip Mourglia lives in Monett, Missouri, with her husband, Rex, and manages her 67-acre forest. She is a forester for the Southwest Missouri RC & D (USDA NRCS) and assists landowners and farmers with forest and wildlife management, tree plantings along streams, and wind-break designs.