

REVIEW OF THE MINIMAX 16" BANDSAW

BY Art Liebeskind

INTRODUCTION

In the last couple of years, I learned that band saws are for a whole lot more than sawing curves in thick lumber. This was in effect an awakening for me because I started woodworking with the noble ambition to get the biggest and best tilting Arbor saw ever owned by a young man who was interested in cutting wood. Let the record show that I started with a \$40 saw advertised in Popular Mechanic's Magazine and ended up with my present shop setup which is a Delta Unisaw with a 60 in. sliding table. Until three weeks ago, my band saw was a Delta 14 in. with a riser and various Iturra accessories. I will admit that it was a very satisfactory piece of equipment and perhaps I have been indulgent with myself relative to the purchase of the MiniMax 16 inch band saw that now lives in my shop. It took me a long time to learn to re-saw a wide board on the Delta. Since my new band saw acquisition however, I am sawing with a 1 inch blade as fast as my hands can feed 10 in. oak boards. I guess part of the new experience is due to the ability to tension a wide blade and part of it is due to a 3 horsepower motor. Whatever the reason, I find it extremely satisfying to put a straight bandsawn edge on rough lumber and then rip it to rough widths prior to jointing and planing to surfaced stock. At any rate, I am very well pleased with the fit, finish and performance of my "Italian Stallion" Bandsaw. This may not be such a flight of rhetoric in that the saw is made by Centauro, a respected tool maker in Italy. The name translates roughly to a mythical creature, half man and half horse. Lets get down to the details after a terrible confession from an aging man who grew up in a household whose possessions were always dictated by "The Consumer Reports" . ("Ma, I don't care if the generic cornflakes have a more favorable nutrition to Cost ratio, I LIKE the Frosted Flakes better!". Here is the confession, I never saw the bandsaw before the trucker brought it to my door! No, I knew I wanted a "good one" and "a big one", and one that looked like it "meant business". So what did I do, I asked John Renzetti, (who seems to know more about woodworking tools than he does flying airplanes), what shall I get? He had seen the MINIMAX 16 at the Connecticut tool show and said it looked good. (As all his friends know, John always goes "First Class") With no more than that to go on, I ordered the "beast". (Note to self, Send Renzetti a bottle of wine in appreciation) Thanks John! I love it.

Down to the Nitty Gritty Point By Point.

DELIVERY:

It was here in 4 days and wrapped up a lot like a Christmas present with a crate on a pallet. The whole machine was shrink wrapped inside the crate in heavy gauge plastic. After bribing the truck driver, the saw was in my shop. My neighbor helped me slide the 440 pound machine off the pallet and onto the floor. It came with a Mobility system (see picture) which made life easy for a solo shopworker like myself. If the crate wood had been a little fancier I might have recycled it to build a bandsawed birdhouse for a Peruvian Condor.

CLEANUP

Lots of Cosmoline to keep parts from rusting. I always feel a little bit like I am a socially aware ornithologist cleaning up seabirds after a particularly nasty oil spill but it was done eventually and revealed a cleanly finished main table and a host of parts that were mostly adjusted and moved with precision by a chain and sprocket. I remember the times I had to adjust the guard height on the Delta and the guide bar would slip out of my hand as I loosened the clamp.



FIGURE 1

FIRST IMPRESSION:

SEE FIGURE 1 Above Big and Heavy. A very clean and impressive design of heavy gauge sheet steel.(more than 1/8" thick) The welds were all nicely ground and though that does not have an effect on cutting wood, it is comforting as a measure of the care and workmanship with which it was made. A very handsome tool with a pale gray finish and lots of precision adjustment devices. I thought it a neat thing to send the adjustment tool kit in a fitted plastic tool box. Also included was a large push stick which I thought was a nice touch. There were several metric wrenches and allen wrenches. Yes, appearances do count and If I am buying the "Frosted Flakes" I want them to look like "Frosted Flakes" and not Generic dry cereal!

MAIN SAW TABLE:

The saw table is 23" x 16" deep and of course there is about a 15" clearance from the saw side to the blade which would allow a 15" wide rip to be done. Although I am not one to measure flatness with an optical comparator to ten thousandth of an inch, this table is as flat as my best metal straightedge can indicate. The table surface is about 35" from the floor which is lower than the Delta but seems a comfortable work height for my 6ft 2 in size. The table is ground but not polished and seems to be getting slicker as I wax it.



FIGURE 2

FENCE:

See Figure 2 Above. The fence is not all that tall for a saw with a full 13" resaw capacity, but to its credit, it has two metric tapped holes that will allow a tall auxiliary fence to be easily attached. To its further credit, it has a single nut and roll pin attachment of the fence to the guide that allows the fence to be angled for blade lead. I have not needed this yet since the blades I set up and tensioned, tracked straight and true. The bar on which the fence rides is adjustable too and is a sturdy rectangular section steel bar.

MITER GAUGE:

The miter gauge is not much but frankly I have yet to find much use for a miter gauge on a bandsaw anyway. Even so, when I reported that the bar was bent, A new one was sent within two days. Customer service means a lot to me and I really demand

good care after the sale. So far, I have received it with a vengeance. I bought a 1-1/4" blade with about 1-1/2 teeth per inch. It was very hard to get tracking and although I finally got it to work, MiniMax sent me a replacement narrower blade and that was absolutely a snap to install and tension to perfection.

ZERO CLEARANCE INSERT

This is a thick chunk of wood and will eventually need to be replaced. No big deal but very basic. I might replace it with a slippery hunk of high weight plastic.

TILT MECHANISM

The heavy trunnions are locked after a tilt by means of a hex machine bolt. This necessitates the use of a wrench. After 3 years of using a pliers on the knobs of the Delta(Arthritis etc.) I am happy to use a wrench anyway rather than a knob.

GUIDES

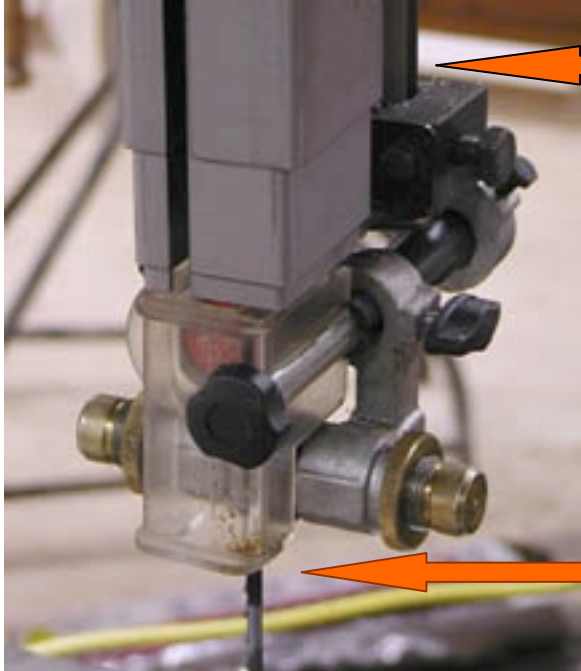
The guides are Euro Style and I rather like them compared to the "cool blocks" and etcetera I was using previously. They are well machined and easy to move. The bottom guides can be adjusted very close to the under table and therefore give better blade support than many saws I have seen which have a long distance to the bottom supports. An interesting feature is the molded clear guard that keeps fingers from the blade and yet lets you see where the blade is cutting See Figure 3 Below

Adjustment is by hand with knurled jam nuts and back and forth with the thrust bearings is with a finger knob. The top bearings move up and down with a chain and sprocket. There is a telescoping sleeve to cover the blade above the guides. **See Figure 4**

The lower guides can be vertically adjusted by using a slotted holder and a clamping bolt. This is useful to keep the guides close together for a more rigid cutting plane.



FIGURE 3



TELESCOPING GUARD

FIGURE 4

CLEAR GUARD

WHEELS

The wheels are about 16" in diameter and are heavy cast iron. The tires are very interesting in that they are molded with a tongue to match a groove in the wheels. This makes for easy tire changing when it becomes necessary. To me, this beats a glued or vulcanized tire which could be a major production to replace if torn up by a blade break.

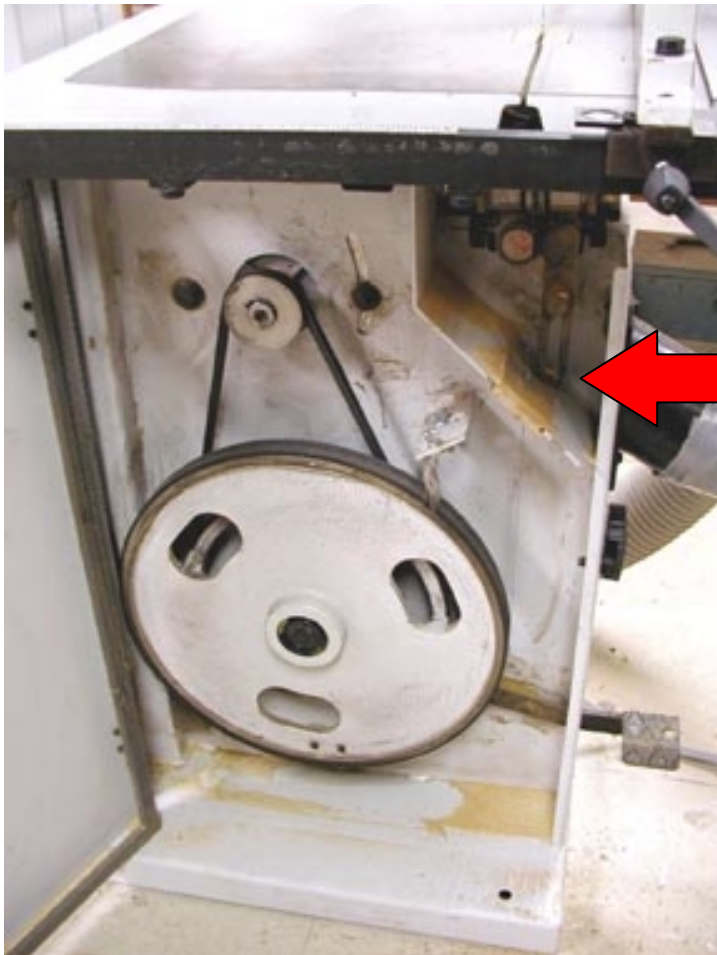


FIGURE 5

Wooden sawdust deflector

DUST COLLECTION

Note the wooden deflector in the picture above. It seems to send almost all of the sawdust into the 100mm collector tube. (Almost 4" and a little tight to attach a 4" dust hose to.) I am using a rubber tube and hose clamps to connect my dust collector. There is also a little brush that constantly cleans off the tires.

POWER

WOW! A full 3 horsepower...240 Volt ,2.2KW heavy duty motor. It deserves its own 240 volt 20 amp circuit. I only had to pick up a power plug at Home depot and use an extension (#10 2 wire) A LOT of Power. With the pulley arrangement, the wheels turn at about 900 RPM. A reasonable blade speed.

BLADES

I bought some blades with the saw. They were satisfactory but not exciting. I look forward to a wood slicer (Highland Hardware) or a Timberwolf blade in the 145" length. As mentioned earlier, I felt the 1-1/4 " blade was a bit much for the saw but 1" is just fine.

VIBRATION

I did not have a nickel so I tried a dime...If you called heads you won cause of course it fell over(actually I never got the dime to stand up). Seriously the saw runs very quietly and with very little vibration.

SAFETY FEATURES

The magnetic switch has a panic stop that must be pulled out to restart. So far I have counted 3 microswitches that stop the motor(or not allow it to start) One on each door, one that works with the brake. When you activate the brake, it shuts down the motor as it stops the blade. Works very well.

MOBILITY SYSTEM

This has a wheeled jack and a pair of wheels that activate when one end is lifted. Fairly easy to move but positioning it is a little bit like parallel parking. See Figure 6 Below. It works and I may adapt the jack to move such things as my lathe table.



FIGURE 6

CONCLUSIONS:

I have never bought such an expensive and “industrial type” machine before. I am glad I did and I am considering the MiniMax combination as well. It is a pleasure to use and I admit I still sneak into the Shop and just look at it as well. What is the psychology of such a purchase. I am not sure but I know it is a prized possession and does everything I wanted in a Bandsaw.