# Laguna 3000 Series Band Saw Review

Anyone who has inhaled more than a passing amount of wood particulate has probably heard of Laguna Tools. They also probably associate the name with some pretty good, albeit expensive, machinery. Historically this equipment has been sourced by Laguna from various European manufactures. In the past few years, however, Laguna has introduced a line of Asian made machines one of which is the 3000 Series band saw. This article will detail my experience with the 18 inch version of this saw. It will not make any comparisons to other brands so if that is what you are after; check out the Oct. 2012 issue of Woodworker Journal. There you will find the kind of in-depth analysis that is typical of products advertised in their publication. And of course there is always the Web. I love the Web because if I search long enough I will find rational to support whatever decision I am going to make anyway. Certainly you have to factor out the seeded comments and those from internet junkies who profess expertise ranging from molecular fusion to the mating habits of the Lac bug but if you see a common thread beginning to emerge then there is probably some justification for it.

With Laguna that thread consisted of customer service and motor issues. Other than those published by Laguna I could find very few comments about the 3000 Series itself. Maybe the machine is too new to the market or after spending that much money on a band saw nobody is willing to admit there are issues. I have a neighbor like that. Anyway, after 20 years of dealing with the shortcomings of the old American standard Delta 14 incher, I determined that I could tolerate a rude customer service representative in favor of a really great saw and scheduled my new 18 inch 3000 Series for delivery in February of 2012. Right here is where things began heading south.

It will suffice to say, no, no it won't, I'm going to keep harping on this one, that if any of my relatives or close friends ever employ YRC Freight it will be sometime after the day that I die. Silly me, thinking that the new saw would actually arrive when promised I sold my Delta at the first opportunity thereby ushering in a period of frustration known only to those who have ever attempted to re-saw an 8 inch beam with a jig saw.

Early one morning several weeks after placing the order, with this huge crate finally sitting in my garage, I began the unpacking and assembly process. There are really only 3 major components, the frame, the table and the motor but unless you have a fork lift or a very strong wife, getting the frame off the pallet is not going to happen without an argument. Fortunately for me I purchased the optional mobility kit, which on a machine of this size should not be an option. Using a hack saw blade (just the blade) I cut the mounting bolts between the frame and the pallet and then installed the mobility kit wheels. With the help of a few 2x4's and my orthopedic surgeon I was able to maneuver the frame off the pallet. Actually, thinking about how to do this took longer than getting it done. This is not the recommended method I might add but what's a boy to do.

With the frame on the floor the next step is to install the motor. This is, as well, not a one man job. After several vein popping attempts I discovered that the holes in the motor mounting flange did not line up with the tapped holes in the frame so the balance of the day and part of the next was spent fitting the holes with a rat-tail file. After the 6 hour assembly period that actually took 18, the saw was relocated to its permanent spot in the shop and fully assembled, except for the fence. I purchased the optional Drift Master fence which I will address later.

Armed with several pieces of scrap lumber and more anxiety than Mrs. Crash Dummy I punched the start button only to be greeted with a vibration sufficient to move this 600 pound machine across the floor. Out of consideration for the reader I will omit the events of next hour or so. The following few days were spent re-checking the assembly and adjustments. During

that process I noticed a front to back movement in the blade of about 1/8 inch. Closer examination revealed that the back edge of the blade at the weld was not coplanar by an equivalent distance but the teeth had been ground flush. After a few phone conversations with Laguna, they concluded that the vibration issue was the result of a bad blade and agreed to send me a replacement which arrived several days later. Now changing blades on any band saw is not exactly a stroll down Avenida del Sol but if you have a Drift Master fence you have a brand new challenge. I just said that I would discuss the fence later but this seems like the appropriate place to mention that when changing the blade on this particular saw equipped with the Drift Master, it is necessary to partially disassemble the fence because otherwise the lower access panel will not fully open.

So I get the new blade installed, punched the start button again and watched that sucker wobble like a willow in a windstorm. Actually, the blade movement was almost eliminated, not quite but almost, and while the vibration, which now seemed to be emanating from the motor, was greatly reduced it was still at an unacceptable level.

After numerous phone conversations with Laguna over the next four to five weeks, I was notified that a brand new machine was in route which, to my dismay, was to be delivered by YRT Freight. I don't really want to waste good computer resources writing about the antics of this organization but a couple are just too astounding not to share. It took ten days to deliver this machine from their Charlotte terminal to my house in Rock Hill, a distance of about 30 miles. On one occasion somewhere in there, a big 18-wheeler pulled up in front of my house. The driver jumped out, opened the trailer doors and way at the front of the trailer sat my saw. As he began to remove the bracing I asked how he intended to get the saw on the ground. He was about five seconds into the explanation when he realized that the saw was indeed the only thing in the trailer. Without another word he closed the trailer doors, jumped back in the cab and drove off. Two days later another truck arrived but this time equipped with a pallet jack. The bracing was once again removed and as the driver attempted to slide the jack under the pallet he discovered that the forks were too wide. He actually tried to move saw with one fork before I advised him of the fastest way to get back to the interstate. And of course I am keeping Laguna informed of all this. After the saw was finally delivered I received a call from Laguna advising me that I would be receiving at no charge a Resaw King blade for my trouble. This is a $250 blade, so that shut me right up.

Deja view, I think I've seen this before; a big shiny new machine ready to make some serious saw dust with that $250 blade so in goes the start button again. And there was no appreciable vibration! It was no 20 inch Powermatic but a quarter wasn't going to vibrate off the table anytime soon either. I did notice a little blade flutter but attributed that to incorrect blade tension so I decided to proceed with the Drift Master installation before making the final adjustments. Hang in there, we're more than halfway through this.

Why it should be necessary to need universal mounting hardware to put a Laguna fence on a Laguna saw seems somewhat of a dichotomy to me but nevertheless it is so. Let's just say everything is all assembled and it is time to make the final adjustments, one of which is leveling the fence base to the table. But wait, something is wrong. When I lay the straightedge on the table it rocks up and down like a teeter-totter. Turns out that the table is ramped up from the leading edge for about six inches, flat for about four inches, then ramped down to the trailing edge; kind of like a flat-topped pyramid. I am now thinking how fortuitous it was to have purchased the unlimited long distance plan.

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After a few more phone calls and about ten days, a new table was delivered and was installed straightaway. Now I need to deal with that blade flutter I mentioned earlier. After two days of unsuccessfully adjusting the tension a millimeter at a time I spoke with someone, don't even remember who anymore, that told me, contrary to the assembly instructions, a carbide tipped blade must be tracked so that the teeth are well off the tire rather than in the center as you would other blades. Doing so eliminated 90% of the flutter which at this point was good enough for me.

Now I'm ready to cut something, I don't care what. The closest scrap within reach was a piece of Hickory about six inches wide, twelve inches long and four inches thick. I set up the saw for ½ inch cuts and applied power. Even before finishing the first sentence of this article I began thinking about how to describe what happened next. Unfortunately I don't have the answer yet so you're going to have to use your imagination a bit. First, the blade entered the wood ½ inch from the outer edge but it exited 3/8 inch from the edge over a 12 inch distance. Sounds like a serious fence alignment issue, except that after adjusting the drift between a range of 10 degrees left of perpendicular to 10 degrees right, the cut remained the same. At the same time, and here is that part that is difficult to explain, as the cut progressed the blade actually began to bow. And not just a little bit either. By the time the blade exited the wood the bow was a good ½ inch, I'm cutting a compound radius! Prior to CNC I can't imagine any machine capable of replicating this shape in a single pass if you actually wanted such a result.

O.k., enough is enough. Here we are somewhere in December, at this point I'm not even sure what year it is. My projects are nine months behind and I've invested well over a hundred hours of my time in packing, unpacking, assembly, disassembly, adjusting, phone calls, etc. For what I had invested thus far I could have had a couple of 24 inch Italian made saws sitting in my shop. A rational man would have surrendered long ago but when it comes to machinery I am apparently too stubborn to admit defeat. Well not anymore.

My next phone call to Laguna was intended to specify just how quickly they were to remove this saw from my premises but in a successful attempt to mitigate my trauma the customer service rep managed to engage me in a discussion of the issues. It was then that he rather offhandedly mentioned, "a while back we got in some blades that were sharpened only on one side". What?? If that were true would the blade not pull to the sharpened side? So once again I agreed to try another blade which this time arrived rather quickly as YRT Freight was not involved. I now know the source of my free blade by the way. The replacement runs fairly true, cuts fairly straight and is fairly vibration free.

So what's the bottom line here? Every manufacturer will make a bad product now and again, I know that because I've bought every one of 'em, a fact to which all of my neighbors within shouting distance will attest. What is a representative sampling for a machine like this? Well it's not like it's possible to try three or four before making a selection so it is critical to have the confidence that the one we get will perform as advertised. In my case I had the opportunity (perhaps a poor choice of words) to try two different machines and I had issues with both so that tells me that I would probably have issues with a third or fourth. And the issues are simply a manifestation of poor Asian workmanship and quality control. I have used other Asian built band saws and find the 3000 Series to be no better, as it relates to functionality, but certainly more expensive.

Once again just to be clear, all of the preceding comments are directed specifically to the 3000 Series band saw and are not intended to be an indictment of any other Laguna product. I'm

sure they offer some excellent equipment, well, except for band saw blades; I had to go through five of those to find one that worked.

Finally, the Drift Master fence. This is a $400 accessory that is supposed to provide expedited drift adjustment, and it pretty much does. The thin metal adjusting knob kind of hurts my delicate little hand and it would very helpful to those of us whose dementia prevents recollection of what we did 10 minutes earlier, to have directional arrows on the knob. The bigger issue, at least for me, is whether or not I really need this feature. I use a band saw principally for re-sawing or straight cuts, i.e.veneers, so I infrequently need to change blades. In fact, I may never ever again remove this blade. Anyway, no more often than I need to adjust the drift, for $400 it would not be a major inconvenience to do it the old fashioned way. Another feature of the Drift Master is supposed to be micro adjustability. There is a lead screw and split-nut arrangement that when engaged allows the fence to be mechanically adjusted across the table. I find that when moving in a single direction the system works pretty good but if it is necessary to reverse direction there is enough backlash in the nut to make precision positioning difficult. As a result I have pretty much reverted to the old micro knuckle-tap adjustment method. Further, engaging the mechanism is awkward and can be a real fingernail buster. If I had it to do over again I probably would choose the optional cast iron or 8 inch aluminum fence. Or better yet, an 8 inch cast iron fence, were it available.

The Drift Master comes with an instructional video that would have you believe it takes about 20 minutes to assemble, mount, adjust and start slicing off scratch free, paper thin veneers. That, my friends, is modern day marketing. I have yet to get the fence square to the table while accurately retaining the other adjustments. And the veneers pretty much all require and pass through the sander for proper dimensioning. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, the fence interferes with fully opening the lower door panel and changing the blade. At first I thought this was going to be a major annoyance but since I infrequently change blades it's turned out to be only a once in a while annoyance.

So way back at the beginning I mentioned that while researching my purchase the majority of the negative comments found referencing Laguna had to do with motor and customer service issues. Well I don't know about the former, my first saw might have had a motor vibration problem but it could have as easily been something else. But the latter I can talk about.

In my opinion customer service is, to some degree, getting a bad rap for equipment quality problems that should have never happened in the first place. In my case, almost every component about which I complained was replaced without question up to and including a whole new saw, and then some. What more can you ask? I can answer that! You can ask for it to happen a whole lot faster. It took ten and a half months from beginning to end. Of course we all want to be treated as though we are the only customer on the books and that's never going to happen but ten months is more than excessive. I can't blame customer service entirely as they are at the mercy of the internal bureaucracy and did, I believe, what they could to help me.

There you have it! Would I buy another Laguna product? Maybe, but I'll be a whole lot more selective regarding point of manufacture, for any future purchase for that matter.

By the way, I have some band saw blades for sale.

Phil Vasey