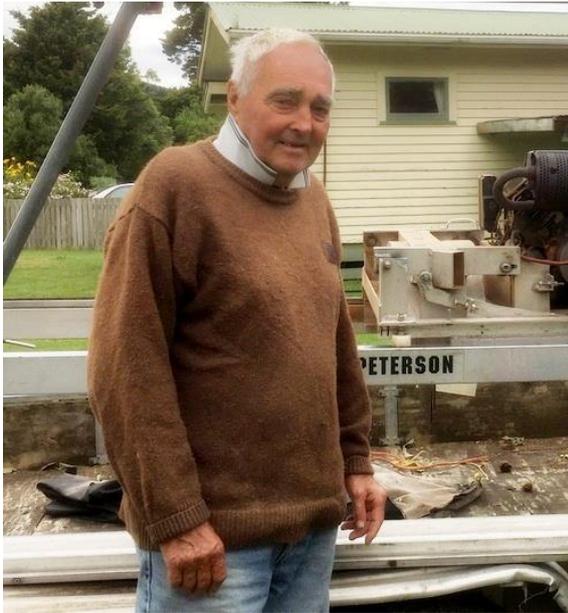


Russell's Sawmill Is The Bee's Knees

Russell Bee is almost 80 years old and owns a farm near Dannevirke, a small township located on the North Island of New Zealand. For the past 35 years, Russell and his wife Jan have been living in a big old wooden house, which was built in 1868.



Russell had been a commercial fisherman and farmer, and it was while farming that he decided to turn his hand to milling.

Already planting, pruning, felling and cutting trees, Russell felt that he could better utilise the timber on his farm. "Farmers don't like waste." So in 1994 he did his research and chose the mill that had the best conversion rate and offered the most flexibility, the Peterson Production Frame (PF) model.

The Production Frame (PF) that Russell got is comparable to the Winch Production Frame (WPF) model available today. Both models comprise of a box-type frame and

have single-point sizing. Both models allow an 'open operator side' and are operated by a single winch.

The WPF incorporates further improvements, such as a more rigid platform with thicker steel, which results in improved durability and easier maintenance. Most importantly, a winch replaces the old steering wheel for lowering and raising.

"Compared To Other Brands, A Peterson Seemed To Be Much More Versatile And Efficient"

Russell's mill is now 25 years old (not quite the oldest working Peterson around) and has been used very intensively over the years.

In the early 90s portable sawmilling was still a novelty in New Zealand. Through word of mouth and producing great quality lumber, work just started trickling in. In fact they never had to advertise their business at all.

By taking on many milling jobs and often working seven days a week, Russell and Jan managed to pay off their mill in about six months' time.

MILLER FEATURE

Russell has done a lot of farm-related milling over the years. He cut wood for rails, cattle yards, fences, even entire farmhouses. For a while Russell held a licence for cutting down native trees. In New Zealand, where there are 1.2 million hectares of privately owned native forest, such a licence is required for harvesting and milling indigenous species.

Russell has worked with many different species of wood and recalls milling Macrocarpa logs that were two metres in diameter, and working with very heavy Matai logs.

The Matai were 1.8m in diameter and so heavy (weighing in at six tonnes a piece), that they had to dig the ground out from underneath the mill to accommodate them. They simply couldn't be handled otherwise. The biggest piece of lumber he ever produced was a beam cut from an Elm, measuring a whopping 7.2m x 800cm x 100cm.



When logging companies finish harvesting pine trees from woodlots, logs are often left behind if they don't make up a full truckload. This provided a good opportunity for Russell, as the owner of the logs would call him in to mill the timber.

One of Russell's most memorable projects involved milling native logs deep in the bush. Unfortunately the authorities didn't allow him to carve a road to retrieve them, so they ordered a huge Sikorsky helicopter. Russell says it was amazing to watch how the pilot was able to navigate logs dead-straight (within 20-30 mm) onto the mill.



On another project, the Sikorsky was hired again to lift several Rimu and Matai logs out of the bush. This timber was so valuable, that the owner of the wood was able to pay off this farm in three months with the timber that was milled.

MILLER FEATURE

In 25 years of milling, Russell's sawmill was only out of commission three times, mainly due to general wear and tear. This is not only testament to the product, but also to Russell who has looked after his mill well with regular servicing by Peterson, to his full satisfaction.

“Peterson Is The Best Mill For The Best Logs... By Miles”

It's not just Russell and Jan that operated the mill. Their children have milled, and even their granddaughter was able to mill with supervision at the age of 11. This goes to show just how easy it is to operate a Peterson.



Russell is trying to take things a little slower these days but clients keep knocking on his door. Luckily Russell's love for timber keeps him milling to this day. Just the other day he cut some Macrocarpa slabs for a bar in the local Wimbledon Tavern. Says Russell: “I still enjoy milling, even now that I'm nearly 80 years old. Taking on the challenge of a log feels bloody good”.

FUN FACT Over the years Russell and his partner have housed over 300 overseas WWOOFers (people working on organic farms). A lot of these young students helped with milling as well. During one crazy competition, one little Japanese girl beat an older male student by milling 600 LM of timber in just half a day!

Being the old sawmill hand that he is, we asked Russell for some tips:

TIP 1 “Stack timber on its edge, not on its flat. You can bend the flat backwards and forwards, but you can't do that with the edge. That's why it is important to keep the edge straight all the time”

TIP 2 “When making slabs, cut a groove across the underside of each end and glue a timber piece of dowel in it, to prevent the slab from splitting later on”

As you may have gathered by now, at nearly 80 years old, Russell is not quite ready to stop milling just yet. We don't think he minds, really. Russell just loves timber.

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