

Vallorbe Saw Bar Dresser

A handy piece of kit

Maintaining a chainsaw isn't something that comes at the top of most peoples 'to do list', but a well maintained saw is slightly better to use than one that gets thrown untouched into the back of the van every night and only looked at when it refuses to start or it fails to run properly. There are cutters out there who use this type of 'repair it when it stops working' type of maintenance regime. In fact it is quite popular among a number of chainsaw users I know; bolting bits back on that have already fallen off tends to be classified as maintenance, and cleaning the air filter is a major event. Attention to the bar and chain is limited to sharpening the chain and renewing the bar when it either blows the nose to bits or it is bent double in a felling mishap. There are however a number of things that can be done to extend the life and improve the performance of chainsaw bars.

If those of you with chainsaw certificates can cast your minds back to the chainsaw maintenance part of that much overrated training module you will recall being instructed on how to dress the burrs off a chainsaw guide bar using a carborundum stone, at least I can. I was told that it was much more efficient than using a flat file and

it was cheaper as a carborundum stone cost about the same as two flat files and would outlast several boxes of files that were used to dress guide bars. It was stressed by the trainer at the time that after using a carborundum stone it was essential to clean the bar groove thoroughly, he didn't explain that the residue left when mixed with non-flying chain oil made excellent grinding paste and the next chain used after the bar had been dressed using this method would stretch like cheap knicker elastic. He also didn't explain that this effect was almost impossible to avoid as cleaning the bar thoroughly was almost impossible unless a workshop degreasing bath was handy to wash the whole thing off completely. The process was a lot more involved than simply using a larger flat file to dress the bar in the first place which was what we ultimately did, finding that a single cut file used for sharpening lawnmower blades made a suitable tool for the job.

Recently though I have discovered a handy piece of kit that will fit in my chainsaw tool box in the van and requires nothing more than a stump vice to make it available for use in the forest.

The Vallorbe bar dresser is a simple piece of equipment that allows



an operator to remove a chainsaw bar in the wood, clean the bar groove, dress the rails and refit the bar in a few minutes without the need for a lot of equipment or skill. The bar dresser allows anyone to dress the bar rails square and level by virtue of its design. The chainsaw bar is secured in the vice and the dresser is held firmly against the bar, with the file flat against the rails. It is then drawn smoothly towards the tail of the bar and this is repeated until it can be seen that all the high spots have been removed and the rails have been filed back level. The bar is then turned over and the process is repeated on the other side, with the edges of all the rails given a couple of strokes to remove any small filing burrs just to finish off. The major advantages of the Vallorbe bar dresser are twofold; the simple design maintains the angles and keeps the rails square and flat even in the control of the most inept users, and the exceptional quality Vallorbe file that makes up the actual working bit of the tool is replaceable. It is the quality of this file that has been one of the most striking aspects of this little tool. I have noticed that the choice of chainsaw files has become limited. Although the quality is perhaps acceptable, and the durability of the files we used years ago is improved by the vagaries of memory, I do hear a general murmuring among the chainsaw users I know that files aren't as good as they used to be. The Vallorbe file in the bar dressing tool is just one of a range of files that includes the usual sizes of dedicated round files for chainsaw sharpening. The technical blurb I have seen for these files promises better cutting performance, easier sharpening and

longer life which all adds up to a better file and more sharpenings for the ever-disappearing and harder to earn price of a box of files.

Most users will generally opt to dress their bars with a small 6" raker file and they will do it free hand, using a technique that will be reasonably effective on small bars. Where the Vallorbe bar dresser gives better results is in the way it uses the coarser, more aggressive file it presents lengthways, giving a long cutting surface that makes short work of restoring the bar rails to their original shape. No matter how steady the hand is holding the raker file the result will always be a set of bar rails that are up and down and anything but level in comparison, not ideal on a short bar but something that really becomes noticeable on a long bar when felling big trees.

Something else worthy of comment is that the standard chainsaw flat files that seem to be available now are good for just a very few operations before they are fit for the scrap bin – dressing a long bar with a raker file will see one off and trying to dress a harvester bar with one is pointless – but the special file in the Vallorbe bar dresser has been used regularly to dress all sorts of chainsaw bars over the last few weeks and it is still going strong, although I must admit I haven't tried to use it on a harvester bar as I prefer to stick to the bench grinder for such heavy duty items.

The Vallorbe bar dresser comes in its own box complete with instructions, it costs about £13 and is available from Workware Ltd in Carlisle.

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