

A-GRADER COMES OF AGE

The A-grader is a stress grading machine that uses sound waves to measure timber stiffness. Developed by Ensis in conjunction with Taranaki-based Falcon Engineering, the new technology is proving its worth in New Zealand sawmills.

Since the first prototype was built in 2005, the A-grader has been installed by a number of sawmills and remanufacturing companies. The first mill to take it on board was Red Stag Timber in Rotorua, and they recently purchased a second A-grader to operate in their new planer mill.

Red Stag Timber Marketing Manager, Phil Lindsay says there is always a risk in adopting new technologies because teething problems are inevitable. Initial problems related to operating the machine in a sawmill environment. However, the second A-grader was installed without a hitch and both are now operating smoothly.

"The operational benefits to us have been significant. Because it works on rough-sawn timber, it allows us to sort timber for stiffness prior to further processing. This is a big advantage that other machines don't have," Phil says.

"Our new planer mill operates at a higher speed than our existing mill, and we found the A-grader scales up well. It has gone from handling 40 boards per minute to processing 80 per minute, with potential to reach 120," Phil says.

After Red Stag Timber worked with Ensis and Falcon Engineering during the first installation, Phil now describes the A-grader as a "mature" technology.



"The A-grader is much more economical to install and operate than other graders with similar performance specs," he says.

Red Stag's Executive Chairman, Phil Verry says the A-grader is a good example of a new technology designed to provide cost advantages for producers.

"We were the first mover to help commercialise the A-grader, which involved working closely Ensis to adapt the machine to a high-speed production environment. We find the A-grader to be a very good technology that is affordable to commercialise locally. This is exactly the type of R&D support that we are after."

For more information on the A-grader, contact Douglas.Gaunt@ensisjv.com

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