

Cylinder Pressman Shares His Expertise With Vandercook Printers

By FREDRIC BREWER

I READ Jacob Warner's "Printing on a Vandercook Press & Other Disillusionments" with a smidgen of sadness. The Vandercook SP-15 has been used successfully over the years by those of us who strive for fine printing. I have owned an SP-15 for 15 years and have friends who have the same machine, and neither they nor I have had the problems Jake has. Some of the finest Letterpress printing being done today is on the SP-15. Just study the reviews in a few issues of FINE PRINT, the only American periodical devoted to Letterpress work of the fine arts category. I can understand Jake's plight and woes; so here are a few tips. They should help Jake, or anyone having bad experiences, live with the SP-15. It's a gentle creature if treated right.

CAUTION NEEDED WHEN MOVING VANDYS

Perhaps Jake purchased a machine that had been ill-treated by its previous owner, not an unusual thing. A careful examination of the press will reveal problems created by the past owner, and the problems can, of course, be rectified unless the SP-15 suffered some mishap such as being toppled—the machine is somewhat ponderous, 600 pounds without power-inking and automatic wash-up, 665 with. An optional paper cabinet weighs in at 40 pounds. The crucial and heaviest part of the press—rollers, bed, *et al*—sits on a sturdy but relatively light-weight metal cabinet that has small but drilled feet for mounting on skids. Thus, the machine is top-heavy. The first SP-15 I owned never made it to my small shop. The "professional" movers who were to deliver it failed to take in account its top-heaviness and did not secure the press properly in their truck.

The first sharp right turn found the vital top part flying through the air to crunch into the pavement while the cabinet remained in their truck.

THE BASIC VANDERCOOK

I don't know which SP-15 model Warner owns. The basic press was available with either a normal bed height of .918", or .968". A galley thickness bed plate, which is removeable, accommodates the variance for those who bought the .968". Vandercook also offered a special cylinder that was undercut to .070". Among the optional equipment were the power-inking, automatic wash-up, a curved plastic cover for the inking system, a center side guide, an ink monitor, a special gripper bar with five grippers and four micrometer end sheet guides, combination automatic and foot-operated grippers, a galley rack, transparency feeding equipment, split vibrator and split rider, an automatic register plate base with a .082" shim plate and a positive lockup bar.

Absolutely essential to proper use of the machine are a set of roller setting gauges (rods

with small steel cylinders attached at one end).

Printers who purchased the SP-15 whose bed had not been machined for proving forms on galleys received a set of .918" gauges. Those who bought the press with the galley thickness plate (removed when setting the rollers and when proving galleys) got gauges whose cylinders measured .968". Use of the gauges is simple. First, the press must be inked, the vibrator and rider lowered, the trip lever pushed to print. Then roll the inking-printing head about 1/2 of the way down the bed. The gauges are slid beneath the front roller first, adjustments made with its roller support system (a matter of turning the knobs at both ends), and then the back roller is adjusted. When the ink streak on top of the gauges is around 3/32" wide the rollers are properly set for almost all jobs.

SETTING THE ROLLERS

Of course, some jobs require the rollers to make wider streaks. I need a wide streak when using large size wood type. Vandercook suggested a 1/8" streak for synthetic form rollers, a 1/4" streak for glue composition rollers. I find the 1/4" streak often just right for my rubber rollers. Just be certain that if one end of a roller produces a 3/32" wide streak the other end doesn't make a 1/2" one. The rollers are then tilted. Both rollers must also be the same height. Rollers on a proving press tend to sag at their midribs. Get as near equal streaks along each roller's length as possible.

Jake may not be inking his SP-15 properly. The ink is applied to the rider, either streaking it across the rider's length with the ink knife in a level layer, or dabbing it on in equal amounts equally spaced along the rider. Then the inking mechanism is lowered onto the rollers, the ink drum motor turned on, and the rollers (if properly adjusted) distribute the ink evenly from the rider to the vibrator and also carry the ink to the main cylinder. It takes about five minutes to get long ink (I'm talking about viscosity) distributed evenly and smoothly. Short ink takes a few minutes longer. Black ink travels farther than colored so less is needed. I'm sure Jake knows that he should start with small amounts of ink, building to where the inking density is correct for the job. Seventy-two point type requires more ink than six point. To print a good consistent brown, though, I find the stuff really has to be lathered on. Blue and green are pesky, too.

OILING THE SP-15

It is also important that the worm on the vibrator be ladened with vaseline—apply it generously. Vandercook recommended that all moving parts be oiled weekly with S.A.E. No. 20 oil. The

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Vandercook Expertise (cont.)

motor also has a tiny oil cup that needs to be kept filled. Sewing machine stuff is fine and should be applied to chains and impression rails *at all times*. Many of the oiling points on an SP-15 have little red circles painted next to them.

It certainly should not take Jake 15 minutes to adjust his packing. A minute, yes, or even less. If an inked form is on the bed, place a sheet of paper on top of it to prevent the drawsheet from touching it, this inadvertently picking up some ink. Flip the press on trip. Then raise and roll the printing head out half-way. Pull the pawl loose from the ratchet that keeps the drawsheet stretch bar (also called reel rod) tight. While holding up the tail-end of the drawsheet slide add or subtract packing sheets. That done, tuck the drawsheet's tail-end into the guiding device, wrap it around the stretching bar and with a $\frac{3}{4}$ " wrench draw the bar tight and then flip the pawl into place. The cylinder bearers are .040" higher than the body of the cylinder. The cylinder packing, plus the stock to be printed on, should be around .003" over the cylinder bearers. The packing should have a hard feel when pressed down on with fingers. Remember to change the drawsheet on a regular schedule because it does accumulate dents after each printing task . . . both drawsheet and packing sheets should be regular tympan. For fine adjustments to the packing, it's OK to use thinnish paper but always place it at the bottom of the packing, next to the cylinder.

AVOID OVERPACKING

The nylon wheels that engage the trip at the end of each travel are possibly awry or worn on Warner's press. These bearings are on either side at bed level and at the far end on the outside of the travel frame. If the wheels are all right and the trip is in good shape, there is no way the drawsheet will touch the form on the head's return—*unless* . . . unless Jake sometimes packs too thickly. Conceivably he would do this to accommodate an SP-15 whose bed is tooled for proving from galleys and which is minus the removable bed plate. If so, any metal shop can make him a plate of the proper gauge which, of course, must be the thickness of a galley.

Jake says he sometimes gets a tiny ink streak at the bottom of sheets caused by the sheets dragging during a press run. This is normal and happens when the form consists of too few lines of type or when the paper is stiff or just plumb ornery. Static electricity also plays a role in keeping the paper against the drum. The annoying streak is easily controlled, either by repositioning

the form in the chase or by adjusting the fingers on the rods beneath the vibrator. The top rod has sliding fingers. The bottom rod has two adjustable fingers held in place by set screws. These screws can be loosened to allow free sliding.

Sometimes fast cranking of the handle will solve the matter but slow up when you get toward the end of the bed. Usually, I find it only necessary to reposition the form in the chase.

There have been times, however, when I have "tacked" down the end of a sheet with drafting tape to prevent drag. Type high bearers locked in the chase will also prevent the streaking but they're a nuisance since you either need to trim your job afterwards, or the bearers print on the drawsheet.

I have printed a considerable number of books, some with as many as 100 pages, and never have had much trouble with type, leads, spaces thick or thin or furniture rising in the form. If the rollers are set improperly (too low) or the type lines are at a right angle to the rollers, the type and furniture will surely lift. I also use metal furniture to prevent the stuff from bucking up and am certain everything is spaced tightly with ems at the end of each line and locked up properly. Never use a spider chase except on a platen press.

Jake says he is a heavy planer. Stop that! Throw away that mallet, lay off the Wheaties. Plane by rapping the block with your knuckles. Pounding simply flattens the type face, especially if it's Monotype. Yes, indeed, the SP-15 is sensitive to squashed type.

GOOD-BYE TO MAKEREADY

Makeready should be a thing of the past on the SP-15. If the type bites into the packing there is too much. If some areas either print light or not at all when the packing is right, build up those areas with tissue pasted on the topside of the drawsheet, *never* on the underside. I use manifold paper (second sheets), cellophane tape and lens tissue for makeready on my C&P platen but almost never on the SP-15. If the type is in good shape, properly high and the rollers set correctly, there should be no need for makeready. Save that fuss and bother for the platen.

Finally a positive lockup bar should be used to clamp the chase firmly against the front of the bed. On the two outer sides of the chase fill in metal furniture against the railings and secure with a quoin. This will prevent the chase scuttling sideways during a long press run.

Of course the SP-15 is not a perfect press. There is no such beast. Properly used and maintained, though, the Vandercook SP-15 does superb work when the type is healthy and every printing step is reasoned through. Parts and supplies for the machine are available through Vandersons which replaced the Vandercook Co. Offices are at 276 Devon Ave., Bensenville, IL 60106.

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M&H Linecasting Dept. Sold!

The linecasting department of San Francisco's M&H Type has been purchased by Bruce Washbish's Petaluma, Calif. Anchor & Acorn Press and James Heagy of San Francisco. The mat collection consisted of about 150 fonts, of which A & A will add about half of them to its existing library. A few of the goodies acquired included: Optima, Aldus, Palatino and Janson. The surplus mats plus a F-2 Intertype are for sale. For info on matrices contact Bruce Washbish at (707) 762-0510.