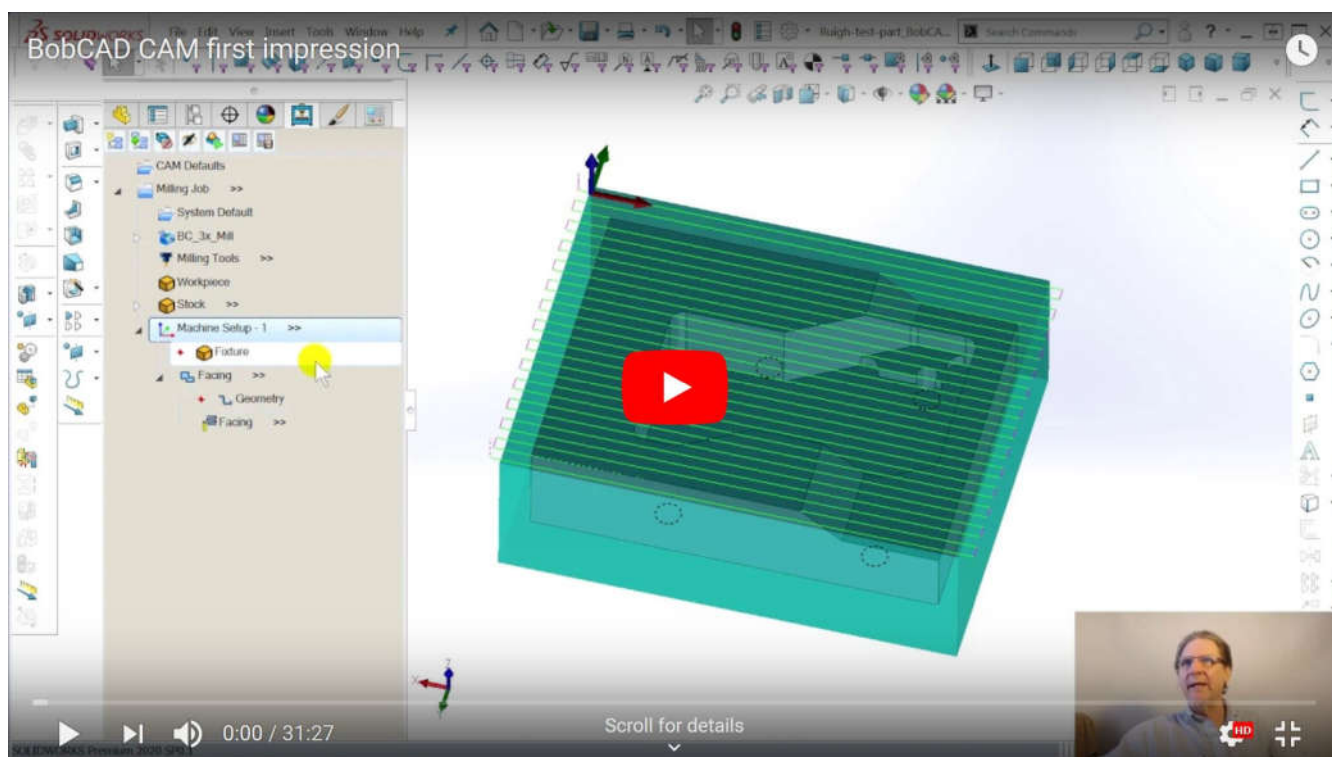—**R**AKO **S**TUDIOS—

Rako Studios » Media » Suffering-with-software » BobCAD-CAM first impression (https://youtu.be/D4vlmvNW5TU)

BobCAD-CAM first impression (https://youtu.be/D4vlmvNW5TU)

BobCAD makes a popular CAM software that runs standalone and inside SolidWorks. I try the SolidWorks version.

Read-only part file here.
Demo part file here.

Note the demo part file will only open with toolpaths in another demo version, you can't open it in a paid-for BobCAD CAM.

After using the VisualMill standalone package, I feel it is much simpler to use the SolidWorks version of these CAM packages since that means there is only one file that has the model data and the CAM data. With a standalone package, you have to export a SAT or STEP or other type of CAD exchange file from

SolidWorks, then import that to the standalone CAM program, and then save your work in a third file format.

This will make horrible configuration management issues, as you struggle to keep track of what version of what files go with each other and which ones are out of date. The benefit of a standalone package is that you don't need to use it on the SolidWorks computer, you can have on a cheaper machine or a different computer. There are also many more standalone companies, OneCNC, EdgeCAM, and others.

My first impression of BobCAD CAM has not been very good. While the program is stable, only crashing occasionally, it does not have the problems I experienced with VisualMill and SolidWorks CAM. Any program made with Microsoft development tools is going to crash, so no surprise there, but at least the BobCAD dialog boxes work right in my old Win7 laptop running 4 monitors.

The other good thing about BobCAD CAM is that you can save the demo files with all the toolpaths. What you can't do is open that file in a paid-for version and have the toolpaths appear. I understand that they are trying to keep people from using the demo version to do all the G-code programming for free, maybe in 20 seats, and then just buy one paid for version that would actually post the G-code. That is another limitation of the demo, it only posts a few lines of G-code.

The bad thing in BobCAD CAM is that there are no help files, at least ones I could find. No question mark icons on dialogs, no help buttons at the bottom, and F1 does nothing. VisualMill was paved with help systems, including hover help, and they let me learn the program much faster, the same with SolidWorks CAM.

There is also no Undo command. When you hit Ctrl-z, it un-does things you did in the model with SolidWorks, not any of the toolpaths or settings you did in the BobCAD CAM plugin.

The user interface seemed weird and clumsy. They have adopted a "Wizard" mentality. This means they took 10 or 15 dialog boxes and put them in yet another dialog box named "Wizard". They think this makes things simpler, when it just makes things confusing. They also name things funny, so it was hard to understand what all the buttons and entry data did in any given dialog box.

The program had a depression propensity to carve up the model. It is just as willing to run a toolpath though your model as it is to cut stock.

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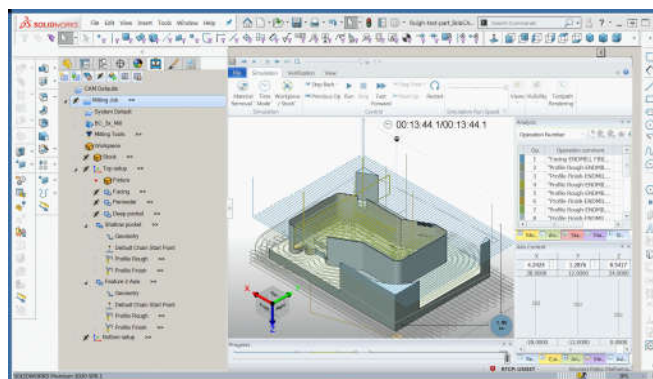
Here I left the "System compensation" of the roughing pass set to "right" and it bombed the endmill through the part. It did a similar carve-up when I tried a simple 3D slope.

All of these problems are minor compared to my disappointment with the simulator. First off, it is not running a SolidWorks animation, like other CAM programs. Instead, they have just opened a host window inside SolidWorks and they run the same simulator that runs in the standalone version. You might prefer this if you have used the standalone version for 10 years, but I didn't.

One effect of this is that the navigation is all different. To rotate the part, you use the left mouse button. To pan you use the right mouse button. Since I reverse the direction of the scroll wheel zoom in SolidWorks to match my TurboCAD, the scroll wheel in the BobCAD simulator works backwards. This makes it very frustrating as you go in and out of the simulator window.

The worst thing about the simulator was the lack of a visual "compare" function. Other programs show you color-coded gouges and excess material, BobCAD give you text boxes.