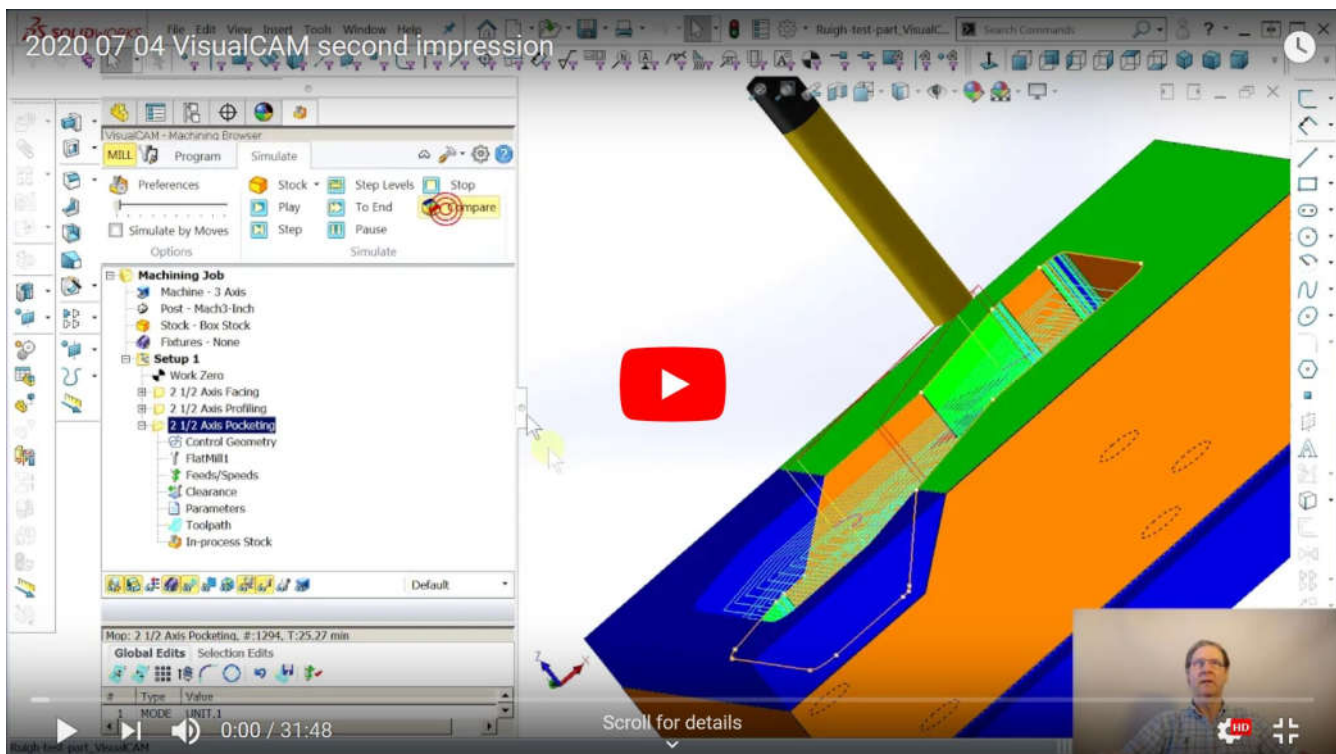




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## VisualMill second impression (youtu.be/qVRVIMMQh-Q)

**VisualMill is a CAM software that runs standalone and inside SolidWorks. This is the second impression of the program.**



SolidWorks part file here.

VisualMill is a mid-range CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) software package. It is priced from \$1500 for a basic package to \$5,000 for 3D capability. While some people may obsess on the instability I am fighting with this installation, that is only an issue for me, and this Win7 laptop. I was far more concerned that the toolpaths did not have little radii in the pockets so the 0.25" tool follows the 0.26" fillet in the corners. It turned out that was an "Advanced Cut Parameters" option where you can make it do radius cuts more accurately than the sloppy default.

While I could not use this program because of the instability, I still feel it is a valid solution, although I am tired of having to outsmart it. I will try the FreeMill version they give away for SolidWorks, and I plan on evaluating the stand-alone package that runs outside of SolidWorks, but I won't be using them.

CAM software is a rapidly changing market, getting cheaper and better every month, so don't write off any program entirely. I do wonder if there is some buried setting somewhere that is causing the program to approximate the arcs in the pocket corners.

While the instability that changed stock allowance from a 0 to a 1 was exasperating, of far more concern to me was that it always wanted to leave a stock allowance in the first place. This also makes me wonder if I change to "all finishing" if it will change the stock allowance back to 0.

Problem is, if I do that, the program adds some three-foot rapid moves down through the part and past the machine, perhaps touching the floor. Once again, I assume this is only my problem due to my Win7 laptop, or that the installation failed because I already had a newer version of one of the Visual C++ libraries the installer has to install before it does VisualMill.

SolidWorks CAM has dialog boxes that if I close it on the main monitor, the dialog box disappears, and I have to use the Windows "Screen resolution" tool to re-arrange monitors to see what nonexistent place the dialog opened, and drag it back into view. Both CAM packages I have tried have serious basic usability issues on my particular computer.

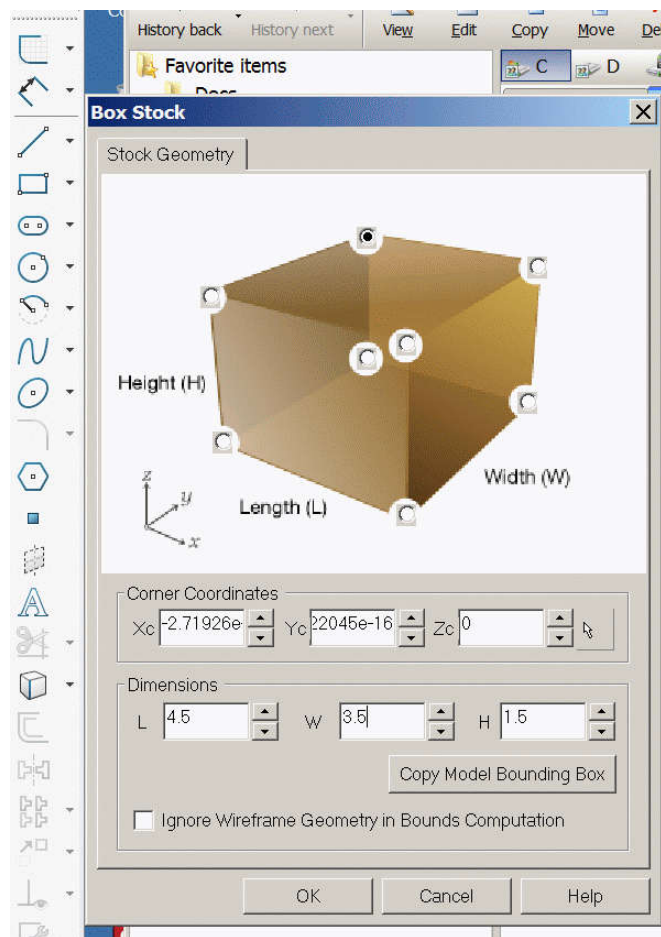
SolidWorks has announced it will stop support for installations on Win7 computers as of a few months ago. Thing is, SolidWorks still operates just fine, with no crashes or bugs like these CAM programs have given me.

There certainly are things to love about VisualMill. I adore the way I can set a cut level by picking two points on the model. I like that there is just one tab, unlike SolidWorks CAM/CAMWorks, that has a feature tab, an operations tab, and a tool tab.

I understand why CAMWorks did this, they can recognize a hole, and then generate three operations, center drill, drill, and tap to make what the model calls out. VisualMill makes you do the three operations by hand.

We will get to those holes in this test part in the next episode, but neither SolidWorks CAM nor VisualMill got the hole depths right.

I worked with a former Apple engineer who used to call marginal things "sketchy," as in, "That design is kind of sketchy." There are other trouble signs in VisualMill that brings that word to mind.



When I went to add stock to make the part from, the dialog box had absurd exponential expressions in some of the text boxes. If  $-2.71925e-16$  is as close to zero as I think it is, they could have just used "0".

I will keep playing with VisualMill and see if some of my problems are self-inflicted, as is the usual case when operating complex things.