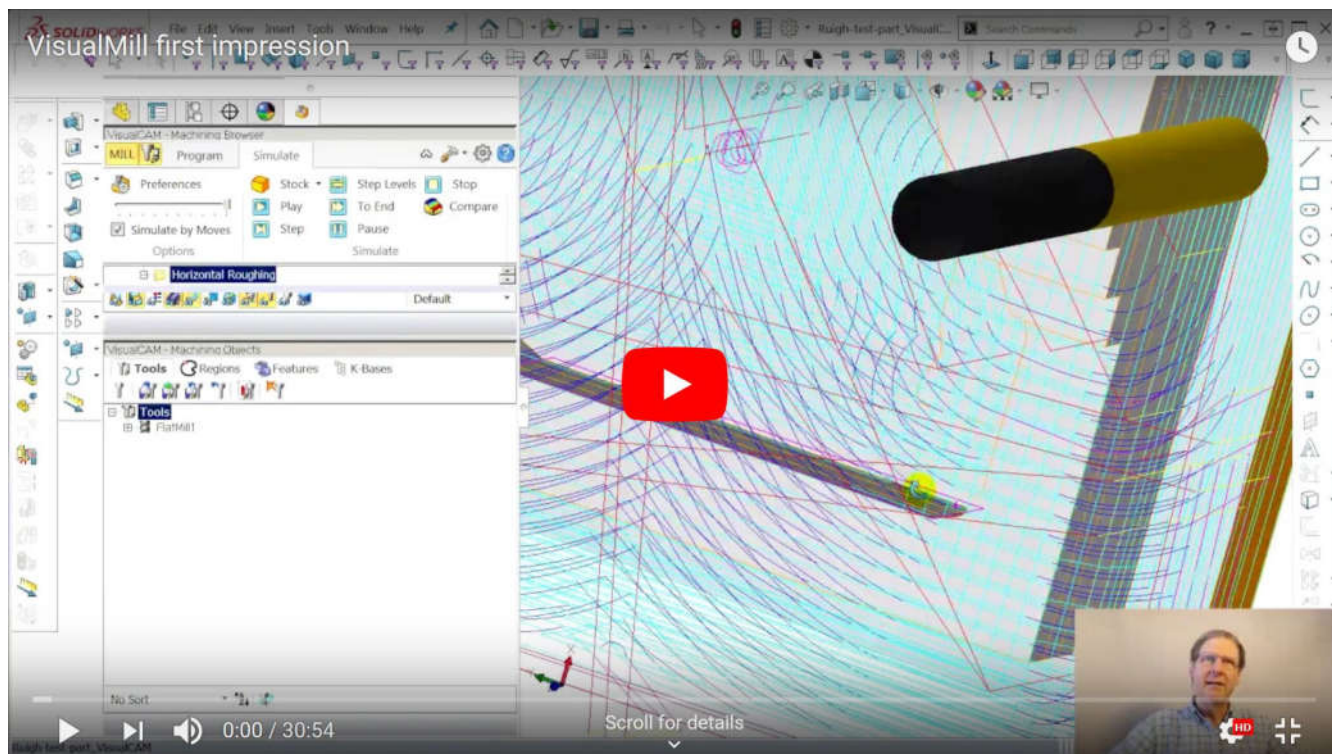




Rako Studios » Media » Suffering-with-software » VisualMill first impression (youtu.be/nKM8SXEwdN0)

VisualMill first impression (youtu.be/nKM8SXEwdN0)

VisualMill is a CAM software that runs standalone and inside SolidWorks. This is the first 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 capable. They also offer a free package that can do basic 2.5D machining. This video looks at the demo for the 3D version. While the interface is intuitive, the program was unstable on my old Win7 laptop. It crashed several times and numbers I entered into a dialog box would change value, ruining the toolpaths. The promise of the program is undeniable, and in general I like the operation better than Solidworks CAM by CAMWorks.

There were hints that the program is trying to compete with Vectric, who makes very popular software used on routers making signs and carved wooden eagles. Nevertheless, MecSoft, the producers of the software brag about mold-making and other CNC metalworking applications, so it must see some use in that industry.

The program infuriated me by taking over my Solidworks, I would have much preferred if they just added the add-in without defaulting it on. That was easy to turn off and get SolidWorks back, heck, I even had Solidworks CAM working at the same time.

Another minor annoyance was that they rightfully say the program has a perpetual license, but neglect to point out that the G-code simulator package they sell only works under maintenance, like the free Solidworks CAM add-on included since SW 2018.

I really like the way the program works. Unlike SolidWorks CAM, with a feature tab and an operations tab where you never know where you are or where you are supposed to change things, VisualMill just adds one tab. Under that is a big wide "Program" tab and a big wide "Simulate" tab. I love it.

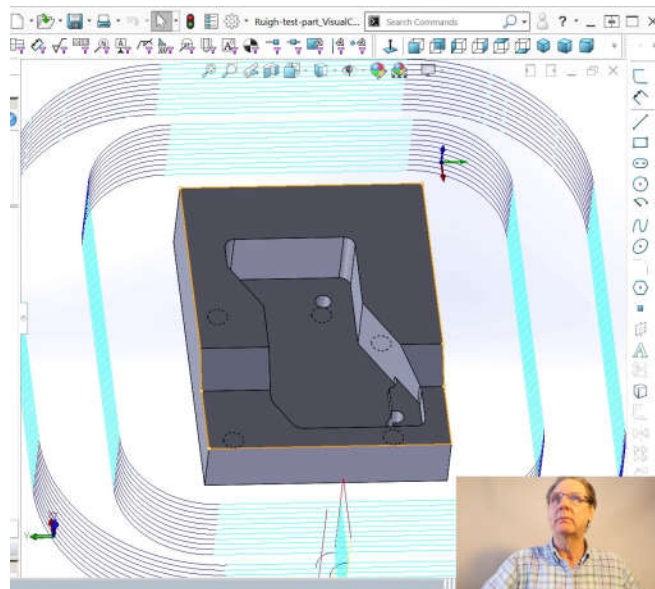
It was straightforward to figure out how to add operations and set part zero. I liked the fact that you can type in a stock size, and then center the part inside that stock box. On a lark, I picked a 3D operation, Horizontal Roughing, and just let the program go wild. It roughed out the whole part, with an estimated machining time of 1 hour and 53 minutes.

The issues I had were that it seemed that every operation wanted to leave stock allowance. When I set the allowance to zero, the program would blow up, changing the zero to a 1, and making crazy toolpaths. I learned to zig-zag back and forth, narrowing down on the allowance until I finally reached zero, and that seemed to take and stick.

Some other times, the toolpath would generate a 3-foot rapid down into the part and through the machine. There was nothing I could do to fix that, I always had to just delete the operation and start over.

These bugs may be due to an installation failure, where the program wanted to add two different Visual C++ libraries, but could only do one, since there was already a newer version of the other package installed on my computer.

Another factor in the buggy unstable performance was that this is a Win7 box, which SolidWorks does not even support anymore. In addition to the flaky operation, the program did crash my SolidWorks a few times. Since this demo does not let you save the work, that became a horrible frustration. I would much prefer it if it just did not post G-code.



I have no idea why the program put in 1-inch stock allowances as in the above picture. I learned how to re-set these to zero, but a couple times it crashed the program, which means I had to start from scratch.

For the next video, I will get to the same point as the end of this video, then start the camera. I am beginning to like the many kinds of operations that you can do, and can see why the 3D package is worth 5000 dollars.

After getting this test part programmed, I will try out the FreeMill program that will actually let me post G-code. Then I can better evaluate the toolpaths and such on my Avid Benchtop Pro milling machine. What is nice is that learning SolidWorks CAM has helped me here, so I will be getting better at programming.