

Fast Firewood

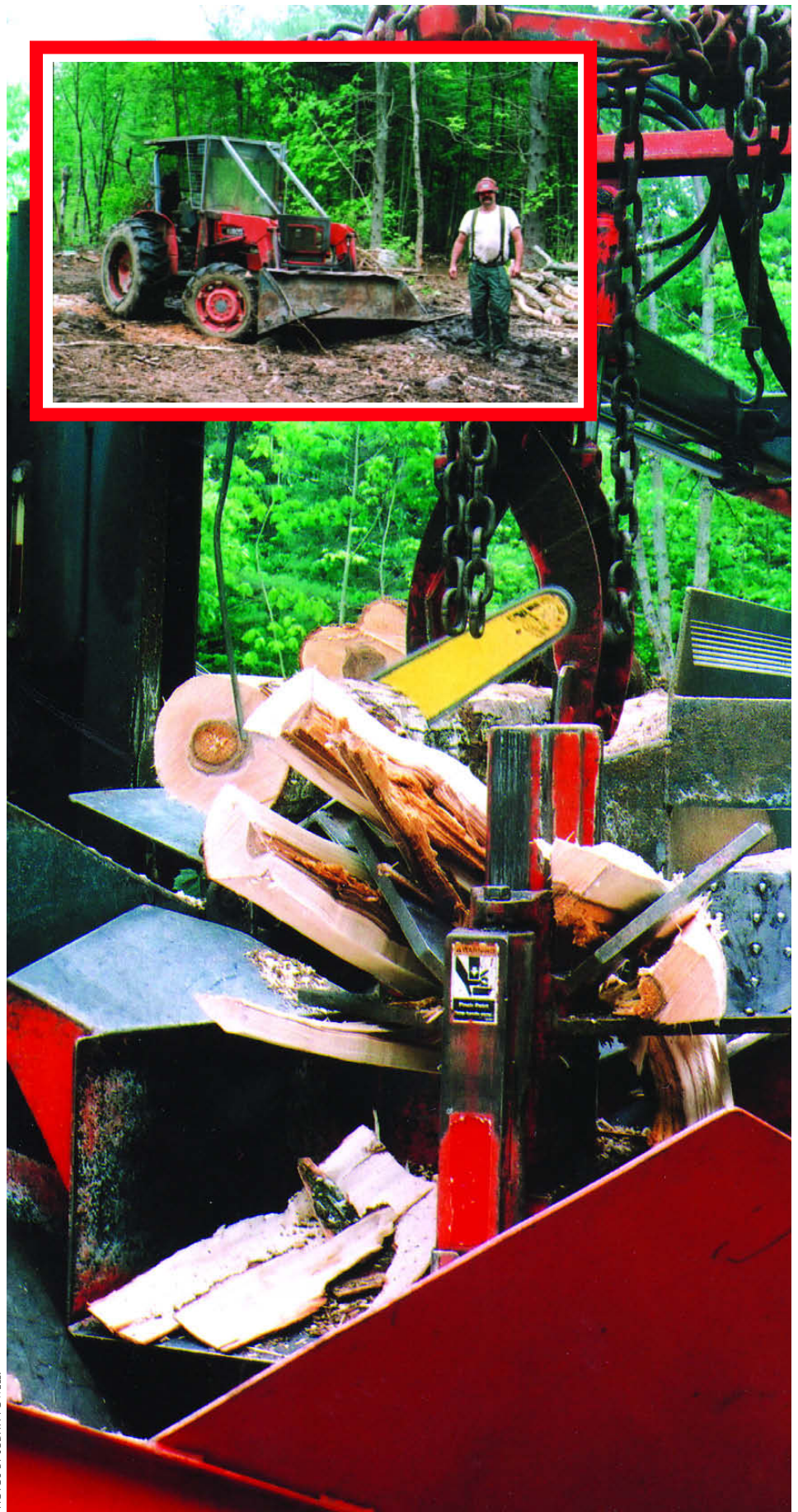
The right gear
for the right job

by Judith M. Powell

Bill Taylor says that purchasing a new firewood processor was a good decision. He knows this from experience nearing three decades, as he has owned several pieces of logging equipment for felling trees and selling wood. Now, with his new Multitek 2025, he has put together the right combination for his situation as a busy self-employed logger. “I worked my way up to the Multitek,” he says.

Taylor started logging as a teenager, cutting trees for a local farmer for firewood and logs. “I’d leave them the good logs and load up my pickup with the junk to haul to the local mill. I welded sideboards to stack it up high so I could take a full load. I’d pull in right among all those big rigs waiting in line. I’d toss my pulp into a pile, then pull over to the office to pick up my check. I’d get maybe \$100 for a load back then. That mill is shut down, like so many others now,” he says.

Taylor works year-round, and the four-cycle, 66 hp, liquid-cooled John Deere engine runs all day like clockwork. He brings random length low-grade hardwood logs from the pile he has stacked onto the folding power log deck using his mid-sized Kubota M5030. Inset, A Certified Logging Professional since 1992, Bill Taylor of Gray, Maine, buys stumpage, sells logs for timber, pulpwood and firewood, clears land for development and forest management and does timber stand improvements in southern Maine.



PHOTOS BY JUDITH POWELL

Now, Taylor buys stumpage, and works plots in southern Maine in all kinds of terrain and environments. His jobs include selectively cutting marked trees in residential areas or on established tree farms and clearing land or thinning for development. Taylor's primary focus is Cumberland County, which is a fast growing area with many lakes, streams and tourists who take notice when trees get cut down and of logging practices, as well as the appearance of woodyards.

"I needed equipment I could take to the job easily and save on cost of trucking it. My Multitek accomplishes this. It stays in the woods the whole job. It weighs 10,500 pounds, and I can pull it with my three-quarter-ton pickup," he explains. He sets up the processor in the woodyard and brings wood to it using his Kubota tractor with forks. Before his Multitek, Taylor owned a feller buncher and a skidder. These cost more to haul, and they turned out to be too big for working in small areas and uneven ground, so he traded these in for his new firewood processor at the Oliver Stores in New Gloucester, Maine in 2001. He decided on the 2025 LDCS model because it is a smaller machine, and is a better fit for logging in tight areas or between streams. Earlier, he had owned a smaller Kubota, which he hauled in the back of his three-quarter-ton 1978 pickup.

Taylor ordered his new 2025 with vandal-proof features. "This cage," he explains, "is one of its kind." Built by Multitek, the steel cage protects the motor and parts against anyone who might try to fool around, steal or damage the equipment. "Everything locks. The 50-gallon fuel tank, controls, carriages—everything," he points out. Vandal-proofing is especially important insurance for a logger who drives away and leaves valuable equipment unattended after a day's work.

Taylor works year-round and has found no problems starting the diesel turbo engine in Maine's cold weather. It's a four-cycle, 66 hp, liquid-cooled John Deere, and "it runs all day like clockwork," he says, cutting up to three cords of firewood per hour. Taylor works with his uncle, John Taylor, in the firewood business. John developed a route of long-established loyal customers over the years, selling and delivering firewood in southern Maine. With demand for firewood increasing as the price of oil soars, the Multitek gives the needed edge to take on orders from new residential customers who buy either green or dry wood in 12, 14 or 16-inch pieces. Most species are maple and oak.

The processor cuts and splits 2 cords of wood each hour, and the waiting truck is



The Multitek easily cuts and splits 2 cords of wood each hour, filling the waiting truck with split wood that flows up the hydraulically run 30-foot stacking conveyor belt.

filled with a hydraulically run 30-foot stacking conveyor belt. John runs the three toggle switches that control the rig. Joysticks open and close the grapple, which loads wood on the carriage to the 30-inch saw; they draw down the chain saw, which has an automatic return, and tip the deck to slide the wood into the splitter. John does all of this from a location that offers a clear view to keep an eye on the continuous flow of logs and split wood, and he does not have to move around the machine for any purpose. The design allows the operator to be sawing and splitting at the same moment. "Before the Multitek, I used to use a splitting maul," John recalls, shaking his head. The retail price of firewood has increased over the past five years to accompany the increased cost of production—fuel and equipment wear and tear, he explains.

While John cuts and splits firewood, Taylor makes sure there's a steady supply of logs ready to move into the machine. He transports random length, low-grade hardwood logs from the pile he's stacked onto the folding power log deck using his mid-sized Kubota M5030. The Multitek can handle firewood logs 20 inches in diameter and 25 feet long. Taylor then goes back to begin clearing, sorting and piling logs for pine lumber and pulp with his 405 Franklin cable skidder. The Franklin, also purchased in 2001, is the third skidder that Taylor has owned.

Taylor became a Certified Logging Professional (CLP) in 1992, and has continued his recertification with biennial refresher courses. He's a member of the Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine and the Maine Forest Products Council, and has hosted field training sessions over the years for these and other industry groups. He also contracts to do timber stand improvement (TSI) work. Taylor got his training in TSI at St. Regis Paper Company in the '70s, implementing its forest management plan in Down East Maine. He is now putting that experience to work in southern Maine, where there is demand for both lot clearing and TSI.

The Taylors work hard at this successful niche business, and they're busier than ever. "Only two more payments left to go on both the Multitek and Franklin," Taylor mentions, smiling, which is a pretty good sign of success, I'd say.

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