

IS&WM's WOOD PROCESSOR *Review*

With this issue of *IS&WM* we begin a regular series of reviews focused on firewood processors. In each review, we send our reviewer Bill Gove out to spend a day with an owner/operator in the field to see first-hand how the machine operates under real conditions. Gove reports back with a technical specification sheet, his observations from the field, and comments from the owner/operator who has been running the machine. Gove also calls on the manufacturer to talk about any plans they have for the particular model. The manufacturer's comments are presented in a separate section at the end of each review.

Reviewed by Bill Gove

In the New England area there are currently four major manufacturers of firewood processors, all located close to each other in Vermont and Massachusetts. The oldest of the four is Valley Processors, Inc. of Amherst, Mass. Valley owner Jeff Weeks has been in the firewood business since 1984, at first reducing logs to fuel wood size the hard way. He soon saw the need for some automation, and in the late 1980s began to build custom splitters and processors. Valley Processors has found a ready market for its products and has been partly responsible for establishing some basic designs used by other manufacturers.

Today Valley Processors manufactures several firewood processor models: the light production "LP" series, which feature a drop style design, Slide Tray model, and the newest model, the "Self-Loader." In this issue I'll review the Light Production, or LP models.

LP Processor

The LP Processor was designed for those who produce firewood principally as a side business, truly as a



Volunteer fireman Dave Hannum puts his LP Processor through the paces.

VALLEY PROCESSORS LP and LP HYDRAULIC

one-person operation. The logs are cut to fuel wood length by a conventional chainsaw, which is mounted on the machine by a pivot pin attached to the saw bar. The saw setup requires only one hand to operate. The LP's drop-style design means that the cut length of wood drops directly down into the cradle for splitting, which is done by a four-way wedge. After advancing the log to the desired length for the next cut, the operator can activate the splitting ram, and while the bolt is being split, can make the next cut with the chainsaw. This

way two jobs can pretty much be done at the same time. The auto cycle splitter valve gives a cycle time of six seconds.

Dave Hannum of Putney, Vermont has had one of Valley's LP Processors for three years. Dave, a retired military man, produces approximately 400 cords of firewood a year and says he thoroughly enjoys his part-time venture. Dave said operating the LP is easy, and he can cut up to a cord an hour of 24-inch wood, although most of his customers request a 16-inch cut. His machine is equipped with the standard

Husqvarna 394 (90 cc) chainsaw and an 11 HP Honda gasoline engine with a 22 gallons per minute two-stage pump for the hydraulic functions. Dave has processed about a thousand cords in the three years he has owned his LP, which means an excess of 1,000 hours of operation. Dave reports that he has had no problems mechanically.

Dave had his processor equipped with Valley Processors' optional lift arms for loading the 16-foot feed through, and uses a Kubota tractor for moving the logs around his yard. When asked for his com-

VALLEY PROCESSORS SPEC SHEET

ments on the performance of the processor he said that he was very satisfied and that the only improvement he could suggest was a protective cover for the lift arms' cylinder, which is located under the arms where a wayward log could damage it. Dave corrected that himself by having a protective bar welded over the cylinder.

Almost all of Dave Hannum's firewood is sold dry for about \$100 a cord to customers whose lifestyles and incomes vary widely in his southern Vermont town. Dave uses a conveyor to load the split wood from the processor onto a small dump truck. He then dumps his split wood in windrows to air dry. Hannum says keeping a fairly low height in the windrows allows the wood in the center of the pile to dry.

Dave will not sell green wood to any of his customers unless they already have a year's supply of dry wood, or unless he is assured they know how to burn green wood. As an active member of the local fire department, Dave has had to extinguish too many chimney fires.

Dave doesn't do any advertising. New customers come strictly by word of mouth. He's been producing firewood for 12 years, and his 400-cord annual production is taken up mostly by repeat customers. There is an occasional year when Dave is not able to meet the demands of his regular customers because of a shortage of hardwood logs. Dave buys firewood logs and has them delivered to his work site, and if local loggers are cutting softwood timber, he

MODEL	LP PROCESSOR	HYDRAULIC LP PROCESSOR
Power Unit w/ HP	Honda, 11 HP, Gas	Ford, 40 HP, Gas, 4-Cyl Kubota, 50 HP, Diesel
Pump-GPM	2-Stage, 22GPM	Single Stage
Cylinder Size	4" X 24"	4" X 24"
Splitting Force (tons)	15	18
Splitter Cycle Time (sec.)	6	6
Chainsaw Bar	32"	25"
Chain Size	3/8 or .404	.404
Hydr. Tank Capac. (gal.)	25	50
Wedges (standard)	4-way	4-way
Machine Weight (lbs.)	4,200	6,200
Transport Length	25'-29'	25'-29'
Transport Width	8'	8'
Transport Height	7'	7'
Tires	15"	14"
Hitch	Customer Choice	Customer Choice
Trough Length (ft.)	16'-20'	16'-20'
Frame	4" Channel	4" Channel
Axels	1	2
Est. Production Rate/Hour	1/2-1 Cord	1-1 1/2 Cord
Max Log Diameter	18"	18"
Max Log Length	Varies with Trough Length	
Clamp Style	Bar	Bar or Feed Roll
Sales Price (before options)	\$13,900	\$22,900

SPECIAL and/or UNIQUE FEATURES

- **Use of a conventional gasoline chainsaw.** Makes possible one of the least expensive processors on the market.
- **Drop Style Design.** Allows cut piece to fall directly before splitter ram and makes for faster production.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

- Live Deck 2 or 3 strand.
- Sawdust Blower
- Log Lift Arms for self loading
- PTO Capability

OTHER ADJUSTMENTS & OPTIONS

Contact the Manufacturer:
Valley Processors Inc.
 330 Harkness Road, Amherst, MA 01002
 (413) 253-4867

MANUFACTURER'S COMMENTS

Valley Processors, Inc. is the only full-line Firewood Processor manufacturer. The LP is the least expensive, most productive firewood processor on the market. It allows the operator to make a cut while splitting the last piece at the same time. The Valley Drop-style Processors are faster and easier to use because the cut piece falls straight down into the splitter cradle. Sliding wood down a tray takes longer and the piece frequently goes sideways. The narrow wedge allows the wood to go straight away unlike the other wide-style wedges.

The new Patent Pending Valley Top Roll eliminates the clamp bar completely. It keeps continuous pressure on the log right down to the very last cut. It never needs to back up to get another bite on the log. Simple, yet state-of-the-art, and Valley Processors works with you to build your processor. And you'll get all of this from a family-owned company that's been in the business since 1929.

WOOD PROCESSOR *Review*

sometimes runs out of hardwood.

Hydraulic LP Processor

Valley's Hydraulic LP Processor is the same basic design as the LP, but with a different saw mechanism. Instead of a conventional chainsaw, the Hydraulic LP has a hydraulic chainsaw which is mounted on the side of the processor, away from the operator. Obviously, a much faster cut is possible, increasing production to 1 to 1-1/2 cords an hour. As with the LP, the four-way wedge has a hydraulic adjustment vertically to center it for various stick sizes.

To power the hydraulic saw, as well as the single-

Power Take Off (PTO) capability.

Size and weight specifications are provided in the chart that accompanies this review, but it should be noted that the Hydraulic LP weighs almost half again as much as the LP, and therefore requires tandem axles instead of the single axle on the smaller LP. Full brakes are provided on the axles of all of the Valley Processors models, road lights are included as required by law, and a vehicle identification number is provided for customers to obtain either financing or vehicle registration.

These two machines do not have the production capability desired by most full-time firewood produc-



Dave Hannum uses a conveyor to load wood from his processor onto a truck for delivery.

stage pumps, a larger power unit is needed than the one on the LP model. A Ford four-cylinder gasoline-powered unit is provided, and a Kubota diesel is available as an option. If you prefer to use your own tractor power to power the processors, both the LP and Hydraulic LP can be bought with

ers, but processors of this size can and do play an important function in woodlot management, and allow an operator to get a good start in the firewood business. ■

Bill Gove is a retired forester who last worked for the Vermont Department of Forests and Parks.

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