

This photo: The Multitek grapple hook holds wood tight during cutting. At right, Tim Duprey's Multitek works under a canvas cover.

Multitek proves bigger is not always better when it comes to firewood production.

## MULTITEK 2020LD & 2025CS



PHOTOS BY BILL GOVE

Reviewed by Bill Gove

**I**s larger and wider always better when it comes to firewood processors? Not necessarily, as recent visits to a couple of New Hampshire firewood producers running Multitek processors proved.

Multitek is one of the older manufacturers of firewood processors, with over 20 years of experience in fabricating industrial and recycling machinery. During that time the company has built an excellent reputation. Multitek makes four basic sizes of firewood processors, all with a wide range of capabilities.

You might think of firewood production as a younger man's occupation, younger at least than the relaxing years of retirement. Not so with Stan Bickford, owner and sole employee of Tri-Town Firewood of Lebanon, New

Hampshire. Stan is a retired auto body repairman who since retirement has expanded his 20 year old occasional firewood business to a more or less full-time endeavor. Not completely full-time, however, because when the weather is rough or when the mercury dips quite low, Stan stays home. He feels that at age 64 he has earned that privilege. Otherwise, be the days balmy or clear, he's out there enjoying his active retirement "hobby" of producing firewood.

Stan had been making firewood for about 15 years with a hydraulic splitter when he decided, five years ago, to buy a processor. His choice? Multitek, a brand which he says came well recommended by other users.

Stan chose one of the smaller Multitek offerings, the 2020 LD. The LD refers to the live deck.

Since he works alone, Stan felt a smaller model would be much more manageable. And since his machine is idle when he is delivering firewood, loading the log deck and doing other chores, he decided a larger, more expensive machine would be hard to justify.

Watching Stan operate his processor is enough to make a believer out of most anyone. His operation runs smoothly with few breaks in the routine. One reason is the impressive, patented grapple feed found exclusively on Multitek processors. The overhead shuttle grapple, activated by a long, overhead horizontal cylinder, grips the log to move it forward after each saw cut and holds it firmly during sawing. The Multitek grapple minimizes the problems inherent with moving slippery and crooked wood with a trough chain.

Stan couldn't say enough

about the grapple feed. He cuts 14, 16 and even 24-inch lengths for his customers, and with the grapple he is able to make his last piece a 16-inch stick instead of waste.

The splitting wedges on a processor must be able to withstand being forced into a block of wood over and over again. Another useful feature found on the Multitek 2020 LD, and on some processors by other manufacturers, is that the wedge positions are staggered on the vertically adjustable combination wedge. With staggered wedges, the initial contact against the end of the stick comes only from the vertical wedge in the center of the multiple wedge set. Other wedges, set at various angles for combination splits, are staggered so that they hit the wood at different points to minimize stress on the system.

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Stan said his customers do not want their firewood split into small pieces, and with the Multitek he had no problem bypassing the splitter wedges with small diameter sticks. This is possible because as the stick is cut off by the chain-saw, it drops onto a tilt-tray. Instead of the operator tipping the tray and dropping the stick behind the wedge, the stick is left on the tray and pushed ahead by the log as it advances for the next cut. The stick then falls directly onto the conveyor, one of the slick advantages of using a tilt-tray system.

Stan decided to keep his motor on the small side. He has a 35 HP Isuzu three-cylinder diesel, powering a single hydraulic pump. With this setup, he can't advance the log for the next cut while the splitter ram is running, because there isn't enough hydraulic volume. His machine is not over-powered, but for Stan, it seemed to be plenty. Multitek has since standardized this model with a John Deere 54 HP turbo diesel with a tandem hydraulic pump.

Stan said his smartest move was to put a roof over his machine. He built an open-sided pole shed that allows him to work in the rain and shields both him and the machine from the hot sunlight. He says his hydraulic hoses last longer, and he doesn't have to dig the machine out of the snow on winter mornings.

Like any machine, the Multitek is not perfect.

The live log deck on the Multitek 2020 is a two-strand deck, and it's not sufficient for the most effi-

cient operation. Three strands are needed, one of them closer to the location of the saw, to handle larger logs without the logs tipping off the deck.

Multitek has recently come out with an updated version of the 2020 model which is basically the same machine but has a three-strand live deck and longer trough. Referred to as the 2025 model, it can handle logs up to 26 feet long.

Some of the hydraulic hoses seemed to be poorly positioned on the 2020, so that they tended to rub or bounce against metal edges and wear through. Stan has been able to overcome this problem by taping a small piece of wood on the hoses at critical locations.

One of the more impressive safety features, not used by all processor manufacturers, is the automatic cut-off of power to the grapple feed at any time the saw is being moved downward. This avoids accidentally jamming the saw blade with a moving log. Also standard on both machines are safety chains hanging vertically behind the splitter, designed to deflect any wayward splinters.

Stan Bickford speaks well of his processor. Working alone, he cuts about 600 cords a year. All of his wood is delivered green, at \$100 a cord, with no advertising necessary.

Over on the east edge of New Hampshire in North Conway, there's another satisfied owner of a smaller Multitek model. Tim Duprey, owner of White Mountain Firewood and Kindling, also has a



Stan Bickford says his best move was to build this shed over his machine.

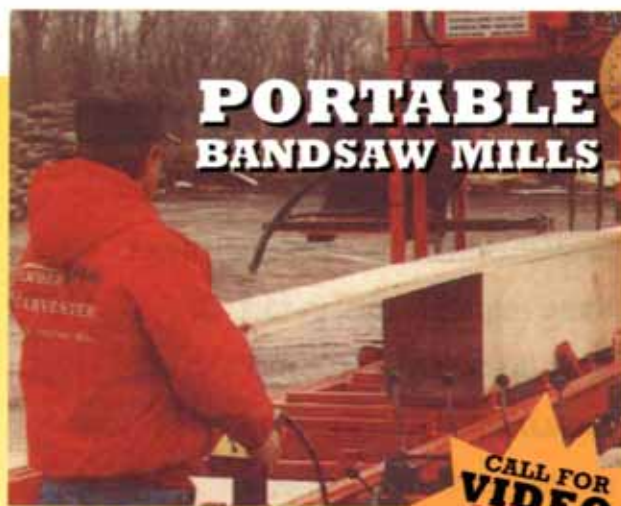
2020.

Duprey chose to have a larger, 65 HP turbo-charged John Deere water-cooled diesel on his machine. Tim and his full-time assistant can produce 14 to 16 cords in an eight hour day.

Tim said he chose a smaller processor because he believes the price is 40

percent less than that of the popular Multitek 2040, but the production is not much less. If he keeps the log deck full, his operator can produce a cord in 20 minutes with the 2020, and fuel consumption is less than with the larger machine.

*(Continued on page 37)*



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(Continued from page 11)

Duprey's customer base in this vacation region of the White Mountains is a little different than the norm for most firewood producers. The majority of his buyers are condo owners who want fireplace wood, and it has to be split to a smaller size. Duprey uses the 8-way splitting wedge exclusively, even with smaller wood. To satisfy his fussy customers, Duprey sorts the firewood logs by species with his Bobcat. Some customers insist on oak firewood, others prefer ash or birch. Tim gladly accommodates them all.

Again, a two-strand log deck was one strand short of being efficient. However, the shuttle grapple was working well during my observation, feeding the logs smoothly and holding them firmly during cuts. Tim did say he didn't think the overhead cylinder was rugged enough considering the long throw required and the possible tendency of deflection. He has experienced some breakage of seals, as has Stan Bickford. But to be fair, that is routine maintenance, at least to some extent, with any hydraulic system.

I noticed an aggravating tendency for the split wood to occasionally bunch up as it drops off the splitting wedge onto the tray sloping down to the conveyor mouth. Untangling this log jam was about the only reason for a break in the operator's splitting routine, and it was infrequent. Possibly a redesign might mean that "wider is better" at this point.

The engine could have a protective cage built over it, and the hydraulic pump motor near the saw is exposed to damage by the end of long logs if the operator is careless. As with Stan Bickford's processor, the hoses were subject to vibration damage because they are not held in a rigid position. On his machine, Tim Duprey made them secure with extra clamping.


Asked what he as an experienced operator appreciated about his Multitek 2020, Tim was especially

enthusiastic about the grapple feed and the excellent control of the wood. Another of his favorite features is the tilt-tray which holds the stick after the chainsaw has cut it. Rarely does the operator need to reposition the stick before it is pushed into the wedge.

Larger Multitek processors have

an optional operator's cab (heated or air-conditioned), but Tim feels a cab wouldn't help him. He wants his operator to have quick and easy access to fix a problem in the splitting trough, and to be able to easily retrieve large chunks from the conveyor for resplitting.

Though some firewood producers



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have customers who don't mind receiving the fines and small splits for kindling. Duprey's customers seldom tolerate them. So the removal of the small material is a problem, and the removal tray at the top of the conveyor does not do the job to Tim's satisfaction.

Until recently, Duprey dumped his split wood in windrows onto a field for drying, but he is now constructing pole sheds with concrete floors. The wood is loosely dumped on the concrete pad, with the open side of the shed facing the sun. The pad absorbs heat and also eliminates dirt and other ground debris Duprey used to pick up with the front end bucket on his Bobcat.



The team of Tim Duprey (left) and Butch Thompson.

Duprey divides his long working hours between the firewood business and his home rental enterprise, but still finds enough time to cut and deliver 1,200 cords of firewood a year. As if that isn't enough, he hopes soon to purchase a portable bandmill.

Duprey's delivered fire-

## MULTITEK'S 2020LDCS SPEC SHEET

<b>MODEL</b> Multitek 2020LDCS	<b>TRANSPORT LENGTH</b> 21.5 feet
<b>POWER UNIT W/HP</b> John Deere 54 HP Turbo-Diesel	<b>TRANSPORT WIDTH</b> 8.5 feet
<b>FUEL CAPACITY</b> 50 gallons	<b>TRANSPORT HEIGHT</b> 12 feet
<b>FUEL CONSUMPTION</b> 1.5 gallons/hour	<b>TIRES</b> 16-inch
<b>SPLITTER OPENING</b> 27 inches	<b>HITCH</b> Pintle ring
<b>SPLITTER CYCLE TIME</b> 4.5 seconds	<b>TROUGH LENGTH</b> 13 feet
<b>HYDR. PUMP</b> Tandem	<b>LOG INFEEED</b> Shuttle Grapple
<b>HYDR. TANK CAP.</b> 50 gallons	<b>AXLES</b> Tandem
<b>CHAIN SIZE</b> .404 inches	<b>DECK</b> 2-strand live, 7.75 feet
<b>WEDGES (STANDARD)</b> Floating 6-way	<b>HOURLY PRODUCTION</b> 1 1/2 to 2 cords
<b>MACHINE WEIGHT (LBS)</b> 8,600	<b>MAX LOG DIAMETER</b> 20 inches

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Stan Bickford at the joy stick controls of his 2020LDCS.

wood price of \$125 for dry and \$110 for green may seem high, but maybe not when you consider the extra efforts needed to satisfy his condo customers and the high price Duprey has to pay for his wood. Competition from local paper and fuel chip markets keeps his cost at about \$65 a cord.

So, is larger necessarily better? It certainly doesn't appear so with Tri-Town Firewood of Lebanon and

White Mountain Firewood of North Conway. With their level of production and return on investment, smaller machines have proven to be a better choice. Both Stan Bickford and Tim Duprey report that the Multitek 2020 LD is a rugged machine, well designed overall, and quite efficient in its function. ■

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

### MANUFACTURER'S COMMENTS

This 2025CS and 2020LDCS firewood processors are fast becoming our biggest sellers for our professional customers. The 2025CS is a tough, portable, one-man processor that features a 54 HP turbo-charged John Deere liquid-cooled diesel. One man can saw and split firewood at a rate of up to two cords per hour from random length low-grade hardwood logs 20 inches in diameter and 25 feet long. Standard features include joystick operator controls, fold down three arm live deck, and patented overhead log in-feed shuttle grapple. Also included are a hydraulic drive saw with .404 inch pitch 18H chain and a floating, interchangeable 4, 6 or 8-way splitter head that is vertically adjustable. You can quick-connect to a rugged 20 foot or 30 foot discharge conveyor for loading a truck or for stockpiling. This processor is also available in a shorter 20 foot version, the Model 2020LDCS, which is 5 feet shorter, has one less livedeck arm and is available with an optional log lift arm.

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