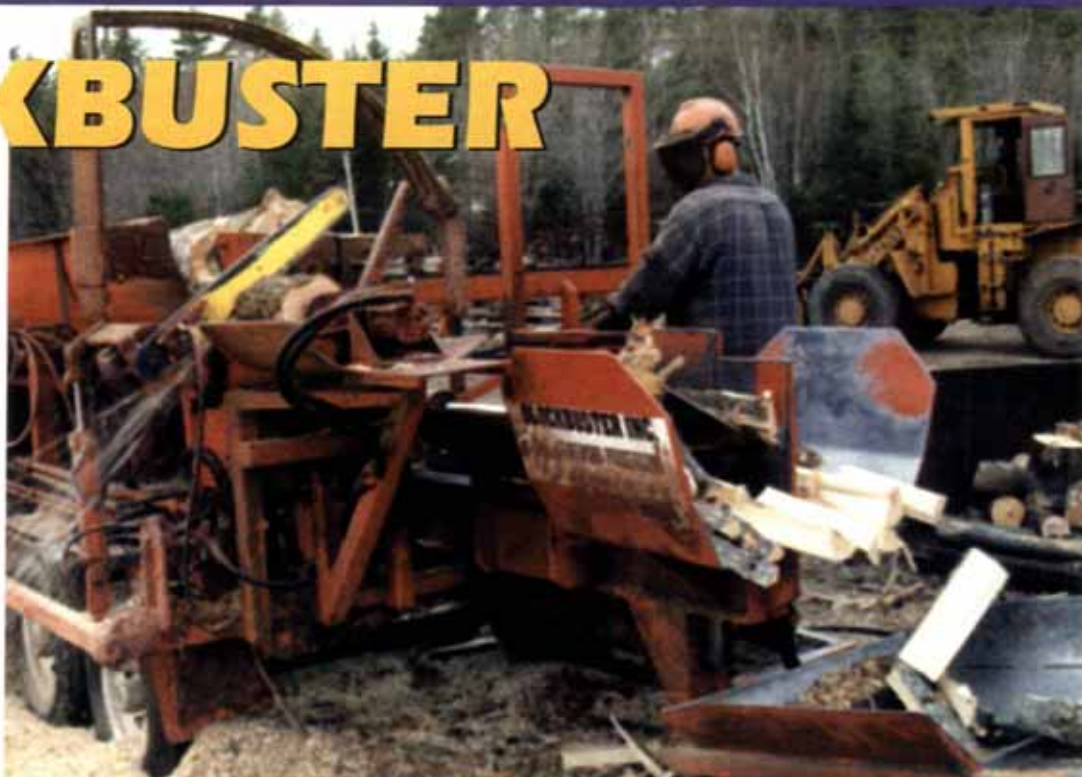


BLOCKBUSTER 22-22

**A well-designed,
rugged processor
that stands up well
to the challenge
of heavy-duty,
commercial use.**

By Bill Gove



Firewood processors manufactured today are mostly rugged and well-built machines.

They can stand the test. Manufacturers, of course, make many claims of performance levels reached by their machines, and a few achieve the upper limits of these standards. And skillful operation and proper machine care can improve performance, too. But the most valid recommendation of any machine comes from experienced users, the full-time firewood producers who know their machines.

So, with a need to look once again at a machine designed for heavy commercial use, I sought out one of the largest firewood producers in Maine. Hawkes Firewood in Phippsburg has been in business for 26 years and for a number of years has been using a Blockbuster B-1 model, the

largest processor made by Iowa-based Blockbuster, Inc. The B-1 is now known as the 22-22 model.

Phippsburg, Maine is a small coastal community, not exactly in a location one might expect for an enterprise of this magnitude. It's not in the heart of logging country, but it is close to a large firewood market area. Owner Mark Hawkes said that he has about 1,500 firewood customers.

Hawkes began his firewood business 26 years ago in the manner that most firewood producers did, with hand tools, chain saw, and a small splitter. For the past 16 years, he has been using processors, starting out with a couple of models that were not able to stand the test of endurance. Then seven years ago, he switched to Blockbuster, and is now on his second large Blockbuster machine. He has put as much as

20,000 cords of firewood through the latest machine, and is happy with its performance.

Blockbuster has been making processors and other equipment since 1987 in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. We reviewed the company's medium-sized model (B-2) in the Oct./Nov. 1998 issue of *Sawmill & Woodlot*. The 22-22 model used by Hawkes Firewood is designed for heavy-duty

use. Hawkes' crew tests the machine's endurance.

Blockbuster's 22-22 is powered by an 8-horsepower, four-cylinder Perkins diesel motor which operated admirably during my visit. Two workers kept the operation humming, one a young woman who didn't seem to run out of enthusiasm or conversation. She kept the log deck full and did sundry other chores, allowing the operator to



Mark Hawkes designed a tray to separate smaller pieces of wood.

PHOTOS BY BILL GOVE



A loader preps logs for the firewood processor.

remain at his control station. The production rate was excellent, over two cords per hour during the full daily work schedule. Hawkes was reluctant to disclose the daily production.

The cutting cycle of 5 1/2 to 6 seconds compares well with other comparably sized processors, even better than some. A 5-inch

splitting cylinder with a 30-inch stroke rams the wood through the wedge. But Hawkes isn't satisfied; he wants to shorten the cycle, possibly by shortening the stroke if that's feasible. He's discussed these ideas with the company's sales manager Tim Batey, generating some ideas at the plant. Hawkes hopes they are incorporated

before he purchases a new processor, another 22-22.

Blockbuster employs a unique system, favoring air over hydraulics. Compressed air performs some of the functions that would otherwise be powered by a hydraulic system. The chain saw bar, the tilt tray, and the splitting ram are all returned to their set positions by a compressed air cylinder, reducing demand on the hydraulic system.

One advantage of this system: the operator would sometimes start his next chain saw cut while the splitting ram was still receding. The necessary hydraulic pressure was readily available. The operator has a single lever to control all three functions: log clamp, saw cut, and tilt tray.

Firewood lengths varied from 12 to 24 inches, in 2-inch increments. Hawkes' customers request a variety of lengths, and he's able to accommodate them with this machine.

Blockbuster employs an interesting system of a stop-plate on the 22-22 model, which halts the forward motion of the log in the trough at a predetermined length when the plate is struck by the advancing log. The log then retracts a couple of inches, so the saw will not bind when cutting the block. After the cut, the operator tilts the plate the log rests upon and the block drops into the splitting trough. This is another unique feature of Blockbuster.

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WOOD PROCESSOR *Review*

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For crooked logs or logs with annoying bumps on them, the Blockbuster 22-22 has a leveling lift at the forward end of the log trough, known as an adjustable cutting base. Its function is to lift the log a little should it get hung up because of log irregularities.

Hawkes had a couple of minor complaints about his Blockbuster. One concerned the length of the log trough as well as the log deck or brow. He felt they were too short. Some of his wood arrives in long lengths. He added two feet to the trough to enable the machine to process logs up to 30 feet. Wood processor operators commonly make this adjustment to their machines.

Hawkes considers the Plexiglas shield installed by the company to protect the operator an encumbrance. He said it occasionally interferes with log movement on the deck and with the operator's chores. Instead of adjusting the location of the shield, he removed it. But he requires operators to wear safety gear, including a face shield on hardhats.

Hawkes uses a Blockbuster conveyor operating hydraulically from his processor motor. To reduce the trash (bark and vines), he installed innovations similar to those devised by other owners. He set up a grate just beyond the wedge to drop out small material and hung a slanted tray under the top end of the conveyor. Most of the

lighter, faster-dropping small material hits the tray and deflects away from the bin where the wood drops.

To minimize handling, the split wood drops directly from the conveyor into steel baskets. Hawkes has come up with a practical innovation. For the wood to drop into both ends of the basket and not just pile up in the middle, requiring extra labor to level it in the basket, he mounted the conveyor on a metal pad, allowing it to be moved laterally or sideways. An operator can position the top end of the conveyor over any part of the basket. The hydraulic controls that move the pad are in front of the processor operator.

One of the unique aspects of Hawkes Firewood

is that the company operates two firewood dry kilns, the only firewood processor in Maine to kiln-dry firewood. Operators load the kilns with metal baskets or bins, each holding one cord of loosely thrown wood in 180 cubic feet of space.

A few words regarding the source of Hawkes' firewood logs might be of interest because his situation is unusual. He has run logging operations, but the bulk of his wood is delivered from independent loggers with chipping operations. In Maine, there are markets for both pulpwood chips and fuel wood (biomass) chips, and as a result, most of the larger logging operations diversify by sorting their wood for the highest value markets. Sawlog material will be

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removed first, followed by pulpwood, firewood, and wood for chipping.

However, Hawkes' wood supply has become erratic. Currently, the pulpwood market is depressed. At first, one might assume that there would therefore be more wood available for firewood. But poor markets affect the forest production of all grades of wood. Also, Maine loggers are increasingly using forwarders in the woods.

Felling machines, equipped with a delimiting device, cut the material to length in the woods. Loggers then bring the logs out on the rubber-tired forwarding machines.

This system does less damage to the woods, but it also leaves more of the material in the forest that

BLOCKBUSTER 22-22 SPEC SHEET

MODEL Blockbuster 22-22	TRANSPORT LENGTH 26 feet, 6 inches	MAX. LOG DIAMETER 22 inches
POWER UNIT W/HP Perkins Diesel 81 HP, 4-Cylinder	TRANSPORT WIDTH 7 feet, 11 inches	MAX. LOG LENGTH 22 feet
PUMP - GPM Quad, 40-30-10-10	TRANSPORT HEIGHT 9 feet	CLAMP STYLE Guillotine
CYLINDER SIZE 5 inches	TIRES 4, 700-15	OPERATOR'S SEAT Yes
SPLITTING FORCE 25 tons	HITCH 2 5/16 inches, ball or pintle	OPTIONS Operator's cab with heater and light, 4-, 6-, or 8-way splitting head, 30-inch Harvester saw bar with roller nose
SPLITTER CYCLE TIME 5.5 seconds	TROUGH LENGTH 16 feet	SALES PRICE \$46,500
CHAIN SAW BAR 30 inches	FRAME 2 x 4 x 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2	MANUFACTURER Blockbuster Inc. 2756 Kentucky Ave. Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641 Tel.: 1-888-775-4883, 319-986-5525 Fax: 319-986-6858
CHAIN SIZE .404, 16 H	AXLES Tandem, 6,500 pounds	
HYDRAULIC TANK CAP. 44 gallons	DECK 10 feet, live, three strand, folding	
WEDGES Adjustable, 4-, 6-, or 8-way	EST. PRODUCTION RATE 3 to 4 cords/hour	
MACHINE WEIGHT 9,000 pounds		



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WOOD PROCESSOR *Review*

would otherwise be sorted out for firewood. Hawkes said these changes are adversely affecting his firewood supply.

He purchases his wood for \$18 per ton roadside or \$25 per ton delivered. The weight of the hardwood is calculated at 2.5 tons per cord, and thus the roadside price would be about \$45 on a cord basis.

Hawkes' crew does some log sorting by diameter in the mill yard before loading the logs on the brow of the processor. He has a few customers, notably restaurants, that want split wood in lengths of 22 to 24 inches. Larger logs work out much better for these longer lengths, producing heavier splits which look better and last longer on the fire. For 14-inch fire-

wood, log diameters of 7 or 12 inches are ideal, and for 16-inch firewood, the lift truck operator favors 8- to 14-inch logs for loading on the deck.

Crooked logs, the bane of processor operators, are seldom purchased or brought into the yard at Hawkes Firewood. That's another advantage of having a mix of markets for the logger's wood. But if one should appear, it is set aside for the crook to be cut out before it has a chance to annoy the operator. The two-person crew on the processor receives production incentives.

Wood delivery, green or kiln-dried, is made over a wide area. One of the dump trucks has a partition in the center, which, when secured shut, retains half

of the load and makes it practical to make small deliveries.

After putting the machine through its paces, Hawkes is quite satisfied with his Blockbuster 22-22. Based also on the testimony of other Blockbuster operators, I would have to

say that Blockbuster ranks well in the listing of well-designed and rugged firewood processors. ■

Bill Gove is a retired forester who last worked for the Vermont Department of Parks and Forests and is a frequent contributor to Sawmill & Woodlot magazine.

MANUFACTURER'S COMMENTS

Blockbuster manufactures four wood processor models: the 22-22, 22-20, 18-20, and the 14-12. All machines are designed specifically for hardwoods. These processors are unique in their design simplicity, utilizing "off the shelf" components to arrive at a unit that is easy to operate and maintain. All models utilize maximum splitting power. Your choice of a 4-, 6-, or 8-way floating splitting head provides more freedom in log selection and firewood size.

The Blockbuster model 22-22 firewood processor, powered by an 81 HP Perkins diesel, splits an average of three to four cords per hour. It has a three-strand, hydraulic, folding live deck for 3- to 22-foot log lengths. Its chain-driven log trough for continuous log access provides a smooth operation for optimum production.

If you are marketing firewood, Blockbuster is marketing your firewood processor. It's the most portable, dependable, low-maintenance, high-volume firewood processor built. From price to performance, we're a cord above the rest.

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