

# Wood-Mizer LT50

## KEEPS CURLY BURLY MILLING



by **Scottie Barnes**

For more than 20 years, Clifford Goins has been operating Curly Burly Milling, first with his brothers and now as a one-man operation. Becoming a solo sawyer drove him to buy a Wood-Mizer LT50.

**P**erched high on a 4-acre landing overlooking Oregon's beautiful Willamette Valley, Curly Burly Milling has one of the most meticulously maintained log yards imaginable. A circular driveway accommodates log trucks and other heavy equipment. But the focal point of the yard is a Wood-Mizer LT50 beneath a 50- by 32-foot freestanding cover that keeps owner/operator Clifford Goins out of Oregon's nasty winter weather.

Goins built the cover using two 50-foot beams salvaged from a demolished grocery store. "I found them

on Craigslist, but it was hard to get them in here," he said. "I had to cut 3 feet off the end of each beam because they were the maximum length the loader could carry." He roofed it with salvaged tin from a roller rink that was being torn down. "I had planned to make the building 20 feet wide, but the tin was all 30 feet, so I made a bigger cover." This type of resourcefulness has been key to the success of Curly Burly.

The yard also features a massive shop, where Goins makes flooring and other materials using woodworking tools, including a planer, a straight-line rip, a resaw,

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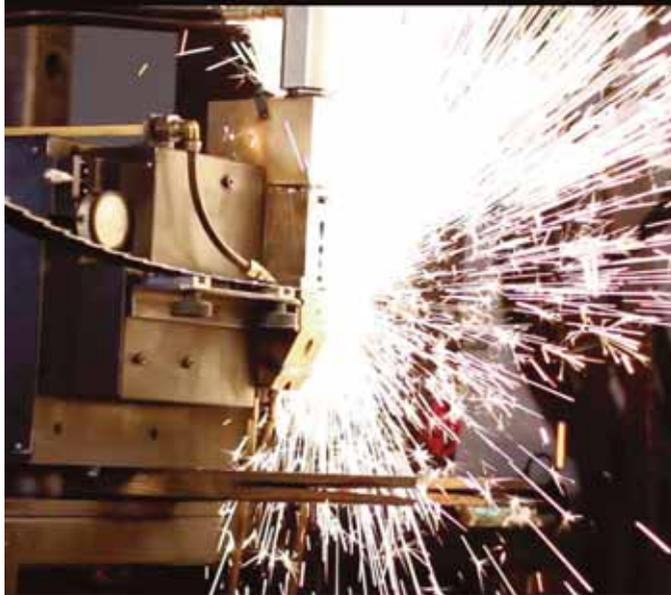
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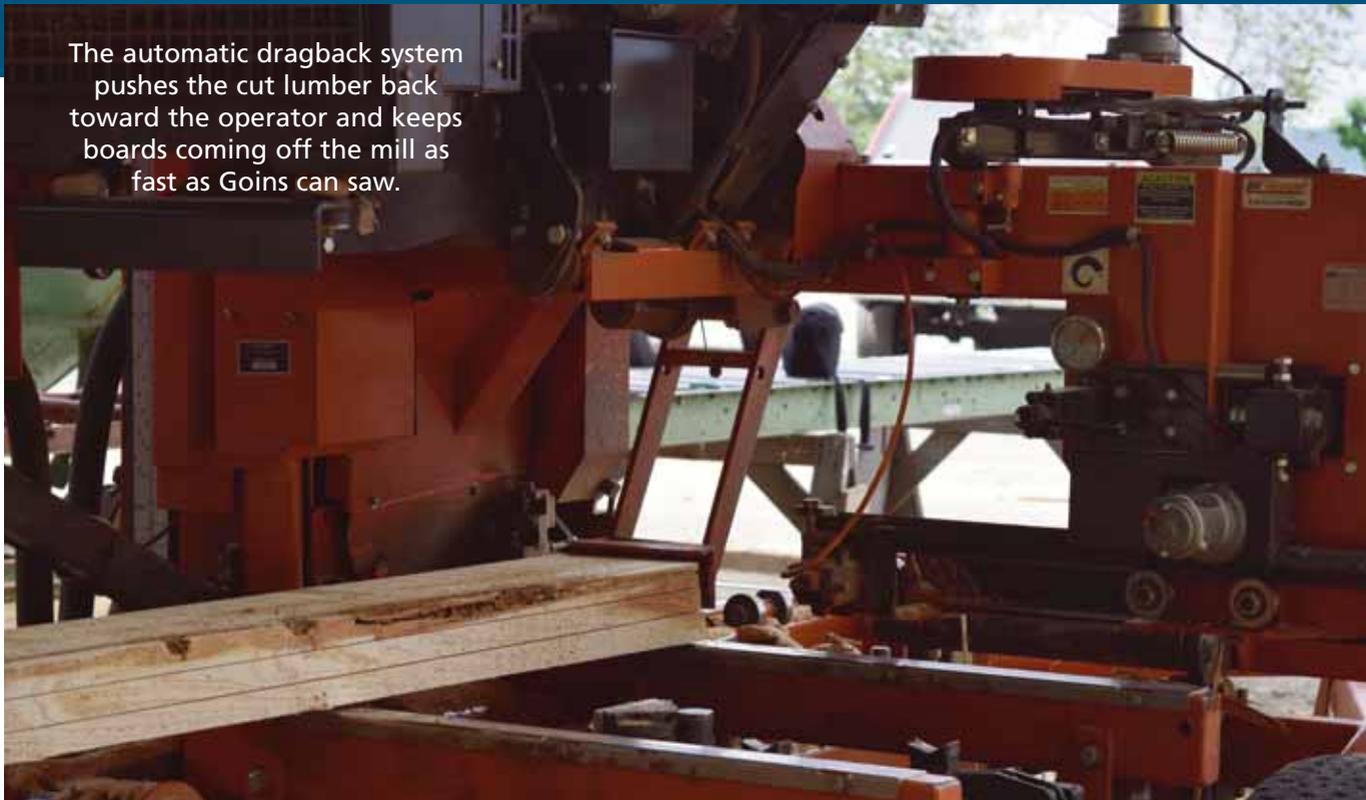


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The automatic dragback system pushes the cut lumber back toward the operator and keeps boards coming off the mill as fast as Goins can saw.



and shapers for tongue and groove. He also does custom drying using a 4,000-square-foot Wood-Mizer kiln.

## Birth of a Business

The genesis for Curly Burly occurred more than 20 years ago, when Clifford's older brother, Clyde, began to buy logs and have them delivered to the site. A cabinetmaker, Clyde hired various sawyers to mill logs on the site of his cabinet shop as needed.

"When Clyde said he was going to have a mill on site, I ran down there to watch," said Cliff. "That's the first time I saw a Wood-Mizer." It was an early '90s model. Soon, Clyde was cutting and milling the logs himself. "By this time, people were beginning to ask Clyde if they could buy some of his lumber, but he just wanted to mill enough inventory for his cabinet shop." Cliff and his brother Jason offered to run the mill for their brother. Soon, Clyde suggested that the two buy some of their own logs, saw them, and sell the lumber. Meanwhile, the owner of a Wood-Mizer LT40 offered to rent his mill to Cliff and Jason. "He offered to let us pay him by the board foot we cut." With a ready-made customer base, an affordable mill, and a site to work, Curly Burly Milling was born. "The name is a tip of the hat to burly or curly maple," said Goins. "I always liked maple burls."

## A Company of Two

At first, the brothers bought loads of maple and a lot of chinquapin—which was very accessible at the time—and began cutting all cabinet stock. Soon, people were bringing fir logs and other softwoods and paying the brothers to mill them. But they still didn't own a mill. "Eventually, the guy we were renting the LT40 from

suggested that we buy it," said Goins. "But we knew how hard we'd run that mill while we were learning. We'd kind of treated it like a rental car! So we decided to buy a different mill."

The two decided to pay an additional \$4,000 to get a brand new 1996 LT40. "We ran that mill until 2003," he said. He might still be running it today, had it not been for an unlocked gate.

"My brother and I decided to drop the mill off at Wood-Mizer for its 2,000-hour service while we were on our way to eastern Oregon for a hunting trip," he explained. "We parked it out front on the weekend like we were told. But when we came back to get it a week later, the rep asked us if we were there to drop off our mill." When Cliff explained that it had been left there a week before, the rep replied, "I was afraid of that." Thieves had stolen one brand new mill as well as the LT40 that belonged to Curly Burly.

"Apparently the thieves didn't know what they had stolen or what to do with it. They just knew it had a hitch and could be towed away," Cliff continued. "It turned up in a garage at a meth bust a year later."

The insurance company wouldn't pay replacement costs. But Wood-Mizer took care of the brothers, selling them a brand new 2003 LT40 at factory cost. Goins said this is just one of many examples of how well Wood-Mizer has treated him over the years. The brothers operated that mill together for another five years, and then Jason moved to Alaska.

## A One-Man Show

After several years of running the business alone, Goins decided that he needed a new mill that he could operate without relying on hired help.

“When I started to work by myself, I thought, ‘I’m getting older, so I need to be smart about this,’” he explained. “I considered whether I should run the mill until it dropped, or trade it in while it still had some good value.” Goins had watched the LT50 and the LT70s run at logging shows, so he had a good idea what was available. And he said he had been very happy with his 20 years of experience with Wood-Mizer. For Goins, the LT50’s log drag back system and bidirectional chain turner were key considerations to becoming a one-man operation.

“The LT50 has fully hydraulic log-handling controls,” he said. The bidirectional chain log turner rotates logs and cants quickly, while the vertical side supports make for fast log positioning. “The chain system is phenomenal.”

Like anything having to do with lumber, though, he said, there is always inconsistency and a set of circumstances that can make something hang up. “The log size, a knot, a chunk, whatever,” he said. “If you get a big knot in the wrong place, a turner can work like a debarker and a great big chunk of wood can come out. In walnut, that’s what we call a \$100 knick! But with the chain turner, it’s much better. It has a forward and reverse, and it comes up and spins the log in either direction. It’s very fast compared with the old turner.”

The automatic dragback system keeps boards com-



Goins mills a variety of hardwoods on spec and keeps an inventory at the Curly Burly Milling log yard.

ing off the mill as fast as you can saw, he said, and two roller toe boards allow him to level up tapered logs.

All log-handling functions are hydraulically driven using Wood-Mizer’s Accuset 2 computerized networks to automatically calculate board thickness and move the head into place for the next cut. An auto clutch engages the blade with a toggle switch. The loading arms lift heavy logs onto the cutting bed. And the log clamp and vertical side supports keep logs firmly in place during sawing.

To begin sawing, the blade and optional lubemizer (automatic blade lubrication) are engaged with a flip of the switch on the operator controls. The variable speed

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## SPECS

### Wood-Mizer LT50

Log Capacity.....36 in. x 21 ft.  
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 Production Capability.....700 BF per hour  
 Weight .....4,370 lbs.  
 Power Options .....35-hp gasoline, 35-hp diesel,  
 47-hp diesel, 25-hp electric  
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control allows Goins to saw quickly through soft wood and slow down for hard wood and knots. “Using the hydraulics allows you to really feather your cuts,” he explained. Five different sawing modes allow him the flexibility to saw quickly. Goins chose to include the optional debarker and lubemizer to extend blade life.

He said the open-sided (mono) sawing head improves visibility and gives him better control. “Wood-Mizer’s mono head is one of the biggest sellers for me,”

he said. The open-sided sawing head improves visibility and gives him better control. “It’s so much simpler without another rail out there. There’s enough going on as it is.”

An offbearing bed that came with the mill is designed to allow the sawyer to tackle odd-sized logs as they pull boards off the mill. But it wasn’t quite right for Goins’s operation, so he has added a customized roller table for the purpose, which he can extend based on the length of cut. “When the drag-back system drops the boards on the rollers, it’s much easier to move and flip the logs when working alone,” he said. “I can put either side up or I can put bunks or racks, giving me options for sorting materials depending on what I’m working with.” Of course, the materials to make the roller bed were recycled.

Goins said his LT50 can handle a 36-inch x 20-foot log. “If I get a lot of big walnut and oak that’s 36 by 40 foot, I just rip it in half and run it through,” he said. When uninterrupted, he said he can cut as much as 2,000 board feet in a day. “But more often with hardwoods, I cut 1,000 to 1,500. It varies by species, length of log, grade of log, or length of time a tree has been down.” Whether he gets a fresh-cut fir or one that’s been lying for a year or more makes a huge difference. “Sometimes if the log is real hard, I have to change the blade once an hour. So it really depends on what I’m cutting.”

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## Remote Operation

Goins is pleased with the wireless remote, but said it had a steep learning curve. "I logged 6,000 hours on the buttons of the Accuset, and then I grabbed a remote. While they're the same, they're also different. So I broke a few things while I was learning. I think that's called operator error," he joked.

He chose the wireless remote so he could stack lumber while he runs the mill. Also, he said, "If your customer said his land was flat, but it wasn't, you can still operate the controls," he explained. "If the ground is not level, one end of the mill is in the dirt and the other is off the ground. That means the Accuset can be up in the air—but you can still operate the controls. So the remote has its benefits. But you still have to use the controls at the setworks to readjust your cutting patterns."

For those reasons, Goins said he would like to see Wood-Mizer incorporate the setworks functions into the remote control unit.



All log-handling functions are hydraulically driven and operated using Wood-Mizer's Accuset 2 computerized setworks to automatically calculate board thickness and move the sawhead into place for the next cut.

## Expanding Business Lines

After nearly 20 years, Curly Burly has two main business lines: one is milling for customers either at their place or the company log yard. That line provides instant cash flow. The other is buying logs and cutting on spec. For that business, the company still tries to stick with the hardwoods. "I cut it on speculation and inventory it, so I have cabinet and flooring stock that I sell to local hardware stores and companies that retail hardwoods for cabinet stock. I also sell to another retailer in Texas, but he only wants the highest grades." But, Goins said, "I'll cut anything and everything for whoever will take it!"

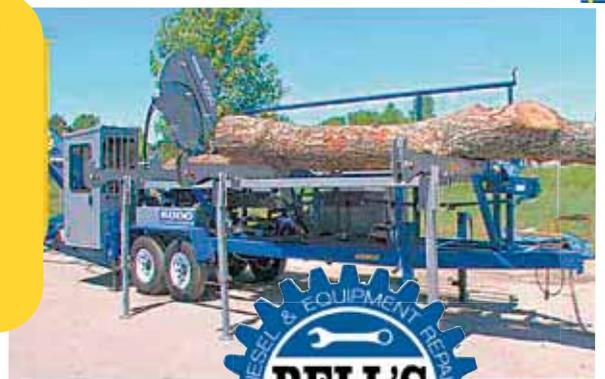
Unlike some sawyers, who take their portable mills off the axle and never move them, Goins's mill is ready to roll. He travels around Oregon's Willamette Valley milling for owners on their property. Or customers deliver to him. He cuts maple, oak, madrone, chinquapin, walnut, ash—any of the local native hardwoods. "But I try not to store other people's

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The log clamp and vertical side supports hold the log in position for cutting.



wood. I am adamant that I cut it and they come pick it up.” That could be part of the reason his log yard is so clean and well organized.

During our visit, Goins had just received a load of walnut, oak, and fir that a local construction company had removed to make room for construction of an apartment complex. After Goins mills the wood to specifications, it will return to the complex with the oak used to make picnic tables, and the fir becoming beams for a gazebo and other outbuildings.

Goins also offers custom drying in a Wood-Mizer kiln. Costs depend on drying time, which varies by

species. Kiln drying, he has found, is both an art and a science. “Maple can go straight in the drier, but you have to cut the load in half to get best performance,” he said. “That would dry in about a 10-day cycle.” When Oregon white oak comes off the mill, he stacks it to air dry and then waits. “About a year in, I start watching the moisture level. If I put it in the kiln with 15 to 20% saturation rate, it can take 3 to 4 weeks to dry.” A 2-inch slab of walnut can have 2-inch wet spots that can take 5 weeks to dry he said, so he air-dries that as well. For black oak, walnut, and chinquipin, he usually allows 6 months of air drying before placing it in the kiln, but, again, it depends on the saturation level.

## A Happy Customer

Goins has made a great go of a business that started on a whim. And he’s been a Wood-Mizer user the entire time. “I’ve watched some of the other brands at the logging shows and in the field. I’ve shopped around and I’m just sold on their products,” he said. “The LT50 is a great machine,” he continued. “And Wood-Mizer’s customer service is second to none. As long as they lock their gate,” he joked. ■

*Scottie Barnes is an author, editor, and owner of a small piece of land in western Oregon. She grew up in a timber town and remembers the days of the one-log load.*

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