

Eastonmade 12-22

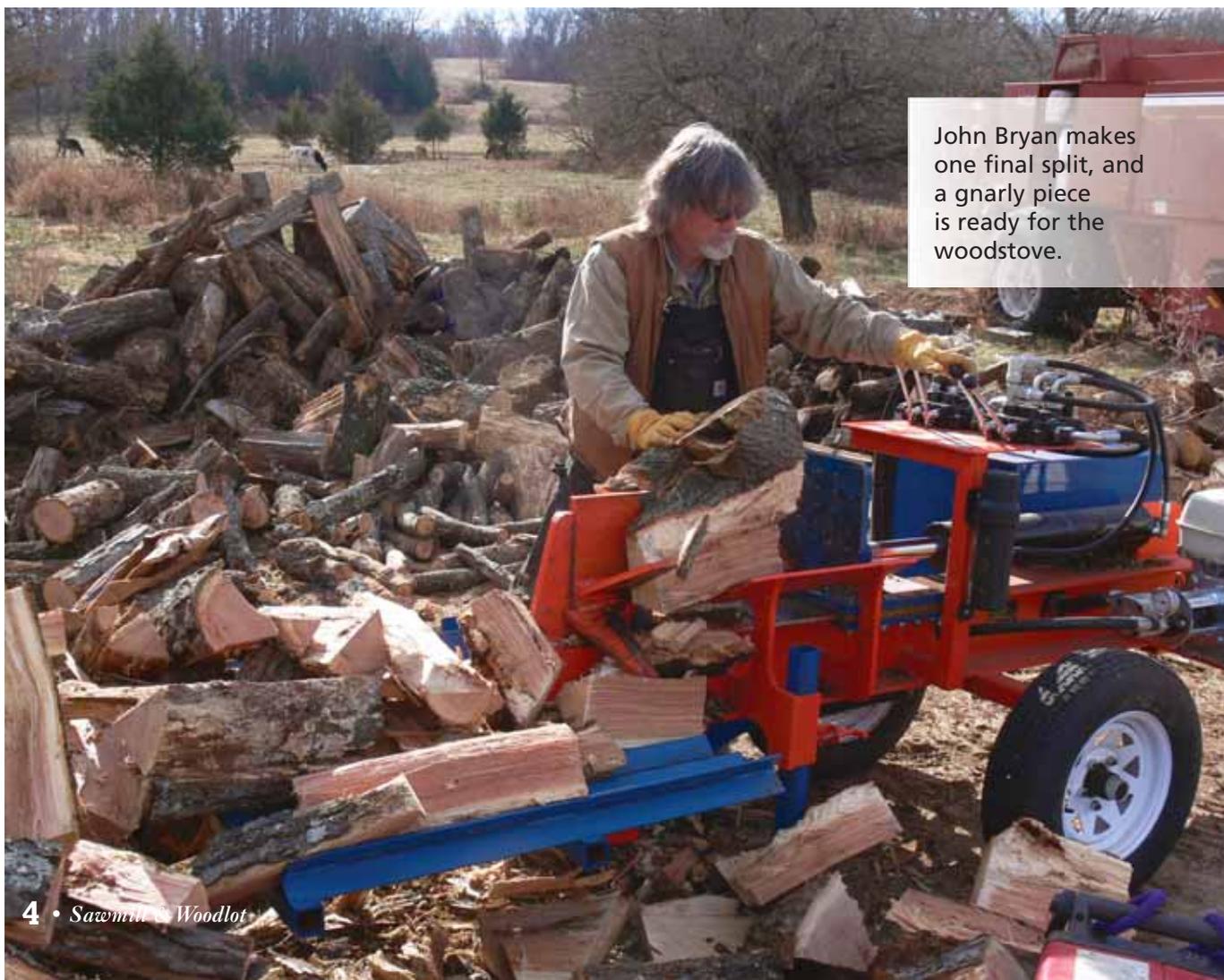
FIREWOOD SPLITTER

John Bryan of Willow Springs, Missouri, is no stranger to firewood splitting. “We used to burn wood when we were kids,” he recalled. “We would burn 4 cords a year in the fireplace, and my brother and I split it all by hand.” Back then, John thought nothing of hand-splitting a rick of wood in an afternoon. Although he still heats with wood, John has set aside the splitting maul in favor of an Eastonmade 12-22 hydraulic splitter.

Just behind the splitter is a large pile of firewood rounds. “All that wood came from a local sawmill,” John explained. “Those are cutoff ends that they load up in my trailer just to get rid of them.” He and his brother, Michael, use the cutoffs to heat their homes, as well as their father’s home. “If I get ahead on wood, I’ll see if I can sell some, too,” he added.

Retired from 18 years working for a local electric co-

op, John drew on his experience operating dozers, backhoes, and a hydro-axe to select a machine that would stand up to the rigors of splitting local hardwoods for three households. He chose the Eastonmade 12-22 processor for several reasons. Top on his list was the solid construction. “I wanted a splitter that would last a lifetime,” John explained. The I-beam frame and the quality of the welds gave him a favorable first impression. Also, high on his list was the log lift, which is standard on this splitter. “Anything you can get on it, it will pick it up,” he said. Other features he likes are the 6-way wedge, outfeed tray, and the ability to tow the splitter in either direction. “When I get a pile of stuff under it, I just pull it forward.” The tongue comes out by pulling a single pin, so there is one less thing to walk around or trip over. The splitter features full-size tires and removable taillights, making it highway legal.



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John Bryan keeps an eye on the splitter while his brother, Michael, tosses wood into the front-end loader of their tractor.

John has high praise for the 12-hp Honda GX390 engine. “Those are phenomenal motors. I never have any trouble with them,” he said. “Even this morning, as cold as it was [about 25°F], I turned on the fuel, choked it, and it started first pull.” John’s experience with heavy equipment also gave him an appreciation of the hydraulic design. The 25-gallon hydraulic reservoir keeps the oil cool, and the system has both an internal and external filter. “Oil filters are absolutely key to keeping hydraulics working,” John explained. The 2-stage hydraulic pump is well matched to motor and cylinder, with a cycle time of 6.5 seconds. This may not be the fastest cycle time of any splitter, but



With the paint worn away, the solid quality of the welds on the wedge is visible.

the machine maintains a good production rate, since very few pieces needed to be resplit and the autocycle frees up the operator to load or stack wood while the machine splits and retracts on its own. The splitter has four hydraulic valves. The first one raises and lowers the loading arm, the second adjusts the splitter height, and the third controls the hydraulic ram. For safety, the operator must push the third and fourth levers together to start the autocycle sequence. “It will split about anything in the autocycle mode,” John said, “but it will automatically stop if it encounters too much pressure.” If that happens, the operator can either continue to advance the ram manually, or retract it for another try.

The 12-22 comes with a one-year warranty. When I asked about the service, John just laughed. “I haven’t had any problems, so I haven’t called them. Andrew, the company owner, said that if any welds break, to

get them fixed locally and send him the bill—but I don’t think I’ll be breaking any welds.” Maintenance is pretty straightforward. Grease the slider, check the oil, fill the gas tank, and get to work.

The Work Routine

Michael was there to help this morning, and the two brothers quickly settled into a well-practiced routine. John fed wood to the splitter and operated the controls while Michael tossed the split wood into the front-end loader of the tractor, and returned an occasional piece for resplitting. Even with the two of them in constant motion, the machine stayed ahead of them. “A couple of weeks ago, a bunch of guys showed up from our church to help split some wood,” John told me. He estimated that they split about 25 ricks in 3 hours! “I burned through two tanks of fuel,” he said. “To really keep the machine splitting, it takes four people.”

John muscled a particularly tough piece—about 16 inches in diameter with a double-crotch—onto the log lifter and set it in place. He started with the splitter down to open it with several single splits, controlling the splitter valve by hand for better control. There was a noticeable change in splitter speed and engine sound when the second stage of the hydraulic pump kicked in, but the ram maintained its relentless forward motion as the wood cracked apart. After that, he centered the wedge and proceeded to break it into usable pieces. Although he came close to stalling the machine, there was no hint of any problem with the frame or wedge. “The I-beam frame is really solid. No matter what I put on it, I’ve never seen it flex even a little,” John said.

Of course, there is no substitute for hands-on experience, and John was kind enough to let me have a go at it. After he had split dozens of cords and bragged about how tough the machine is, I broke it with the first touch! When I pushed the lever to adjust the wedge height, it promptly sheared a linkage bolt. John



Once the initial splits were made, John raised the wedge for a 6-way split. The 12-hp Honda and 2-stage hydraulic pump had no problem crushing it way through this one.

REVIEW SPECS

Eastonmade 12-22 Splitter

Built in	Perth, Ontario, Canada
Engine	Honda GX390 (12-hp)
Splitting cylinder	4 in. x 24 in.
Hydraulic pump	22 gpm, 2-stage
Cycle time	6.5 sec.
Wedge	6-way standard, 4-way optional
Table grate	standard
Log lift	500 lbs. capacity, standard
Autocycle	standard
Towing	DOT legal, towable from either end
Price	\$8,499 (U.S.)

took it in stride, and in less than 10 minutes, had replaced the bolt, and we were back in business. It took a few pieces to get a feel for the machine, but once I got used to it, I was hooked. I split the smaller pieces in half, and centered the larger ones on the wedge. After the first few pieces, I was able to get reasonably consistent firewood. Way too much fun!

My biggest concern was safety, especially when more than one person is working around the splitter. I made sure that all hands were clear and we made eye contact before engaging the autosplit cycle. That said, it was amazing how quickly the loader bucket filled with split wood. "I work by myself 90% of the time," John told me, "but it really goes quickly with two people." The log lift doubles as a convenient table for staging the wood, and nearly all the chips and bark fell through the outfeed grate, leaving clean firewood.

Performance

Overall, the splitter performed beautifully. The Honda never missed a beat, and the splitting force was more than a match for anything we put on it. The hardest part was manhandling the biggest pieces, probably weighing around 150 pounds, to the splitter. From there, the machine did all the lifting and splitting—a piece of cake.

This splitter is a notch above what the average

homeowner needs, but it is ideal for supplying wood to several households, for a tree service wanting to produce firewood, or for a small firewood business. "It's one of the better investments I've made," John told me. "I've been burning firewood all my life. We used to split a lot of it by hand. This is way better! Take care of this machine, and it'll last you a lifetime." John is already thinking about improvements to make splitting even easier. "The next thing is to set up a conveyor to get the wood into a trailer." ■

Dave Boyt has a BS degree in Forest Management and an MS in Wood Technology. He manages a tree farm (2006 Missouri Tree Farm of the Year), and operates a band saw sawmill.

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