

Wood-Mizer FS500

Bidirectional Log Splitter



Using the hydraulic lift, Clifford Goins moves a 200-pound oak crotch onto the splitting deck.

For two decades, Clifford Goins has been operating Curly Burly Milling in Oregon's Willamette Valley, running Wood-Mizer mills for most of that time. The company has two primary business lines. It mills at customers' locations or at the company log yard—a business that provides instant cash flow—and it buys logs and cuts them on spec. That business primarily involves milling hardwoods—maple, oak, madrone, chinquapin, walnut, and ash—for cabinet and flooring stock.

With his Wood-Mizer LT50, Goins says he can cut logs 32 feet long and 3 feet in diameter. But he also uses creative methods to cut even larger projects. "There's nothing too big for my chain saw," he states. In his massive shop, he offers additional value-added services using a planer, a straight-line rip, a resaw, and shapers for tongue and groove. He also offers custom drying in a 4,000-square-foot kiln and can provide both custom-finished wood and reclaimed lumber.

But all this hardwood milling leaves Goins with a lot of by-products—gnarly chunks of wood from the crotch of oak trees, end cuts from various hardwoods, oversize and oddly shaped chunks, crooked pieces, and just plain weird hunks of wood. Goins didn't want the volume in these pieces going to waste, but

he didn't really have a market for them. He used some for personal firewood. But splitting hardwood with twisted grains using a maul or a chain saw was so time-consuming it was barely worthwhile. "An oak crotch can take a couple of hours to split with a maul," he says. So he began to consider adding a firewood processor or log splitter to his toolset.

"I wasn't interested in getting into the firewood business," he explains. "But I was looking for a way to manage my by-products. I hated just giving it away or having it go to waste." So, in early 2016, he bought a Wood-Mizer FS500 bidirectional log splitter.

A Trial Run

Because Goins had used Wood-Mizer mills for more than two decades, he already felt comfortable with their customer service and quality. But the purchase was still a tough decision.

"With normal firewood, a guy with a splitting maul can keep up with a log splitter for a couple hours," he says. "And if you're cutting small stuff, a maul is actually faster than a splitter. Of course, after eight hours, the processor will pass him up. And oak crotches are just about impossible to split with a maul."

So, he "hemmed and hawed" for months. Then he

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The splitter allows Goins to turn by-products—including large and odd-shaped oak crotches and end cuts—into a useful commodity.

learned that Wood-Mizer was having an open house, so he called and asked if he could bring his own wood to put their splitter to the test. They said yes.

“I used the forklift to load two big oak crotches and two big, gnarly pieces of cherry into the back of my truck and drove them to Portland [Oregon]. I really put their splitter through its paces with a 36-inch log. It kept up. So I bought one.”

The Real Work Begins

Back at the mill, Goins really challenged the FS500, and has been very pleased.

“I’m getting older, you know, and I really appreciate the height of the operator deck. It really saves your back.” He measured the deck at 40 inches above the ground with the tongue down and the unit leveled. “So much of cutting firewood requires bending over, but the deck height and the log lift really help reduce that.”

While demonstrating the unit, Goins rolled the first weird-shaped oak crotch onto the log lift at ground level, then used the joystick to raise it up to the deck. On the log deck, he rolled the piece into position and began to split. The bidirectional splitter’s cylinder pushed the log to one side and through the 4-way splitter, sending four pieces of firewood out onto the 4-foot-long tray wings. As he did so, the log rose up, Goins flipped it 180 degrees, and the splitter pushed in the opposite direction, easing firewood out on the opposing tray wing. Soon the firewood was dropping off the wings into the boxes.

The tray wings are also at working height so Goins can stack and bundle as he splits, or allow the firewood to be conveyed to the end and dropped into a box or truck bed. “The ends of the tray wings are 3.5

feet off the ground, which impacts how tall your box can be,” he explains. In about 15 minutes, the entire crotch was split. “That would have taken a couple hours of hard work with a maul.” Goins likes the efficiency of the bidirectional splitter. “With a one-direction splitter, you’re just waiting and nothing is happening while the cylinder is returning to center. With the Wood-Mizer, while the cylinder is returning, it’s also splitting.”

This means double the production of a one-direction splitter.



Goins’s only concern about the splitter was the buildup of chips and shavings in a gap in this guard. Wood-Mizer has already addressed the issue in new designs and is providing parts for current owners to retrofit.

According to Wood-Mizer, the FS500 can produce up to 3 cords of firewood an hour with a 4.5-second cycle time. "I believe it's capable of 2.5 to 3 cords an hour, but not with a single operator," says Goins. "One guy can't feed it that fast and manage the boxes too. But two guys could probably crank that through."

Size Matters

Because he works with such large materials, his biggest concern going into the purchase was the size limit of a splitter. But so far, he says, he hasn't "found anything it won't eat! Actually, the bigger the piece, the easier it is to move about on the table. You just tip it and spin it 180 degrees and it will just drop right back down on the table to be cut. With a conventional, single-direction splitter, you still have to pick up that piece and get it back on the deck. Then it splits it in half and you have to handle each half again and again."

He fed the FS500 a 42-inch log "and it just chewed it up," says Goins. "In the marketing photos, you can't tell how wide the throat is, so I was kind of skeptical. But after operating it, I'm really pleased. No matter how big the piece, the splitter just shaves the edge off and in it goes."

Because he's splitting "weird" pieces of wood, he says, he ends up with strange-looking firewood.

"If I had nice clean, straight logs, it would make



Goins likes the ergonomic design of the controls and the height of the log deck, which he says really saves his back!

some really nice clean firewood, but I have this nasty stuff, and I end up with some weird fuzzy firewood. But I haven't found a piece yet that hasn't burned when I put it in the stove!" Also, he says, "when I hand split, I usually end up with bigger pieces because I get tired of working and just say 'that's

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**Wood-Mizer FS500
Bidirectional Log Splitter**

EngineHonda gas 630cc, diesel optional

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Splitting force42 tons (29 tons/3,000 psi)

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Splitting cylinder5-inch (6-inch optional)

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Hydraulic pump28 gpm, 2-stage

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Production capabilityUp to 3 cords per hour

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The Wood-Mizer chews through a gnarly oak crotch that would be all but impossible to split by hand, turning a nasty by-product into slow-burning firewood.

okay.’ With the 4-way log splitter, I always have plenty of small stuff to use to get a fire going. So I like it better than my own splitting.”

Goins says the splitter is super easy to tow, although he admits it’s hard for him to back up. “It steers really fast compared to the big trailers I’m used to hauling.”

Just One Thing...

Clifford’s only real concern about the splitter was the buildup of chips and shavings in the gaps on either side of the guard on the back of the deck. “If you get a piece of oak with a spike and it gets driven through that gap, it can bend that guard,” he explains.

“Shavings and fir bark can also build up in there. If those shavings drop down on the hot exhaust of the engine, it could create a hazard.” When Clifford called Wood-Mizer to discuss this concern, he discovered they were already addressing the issue.

“They have now built a flange to close that gap,” he reports. “It’s on the new machines, and they sent me the two pieces to retrofit mine.” He said that’s been typical of Wood-Mizer’s customer service in his experience.

The Payoff

Goins had been operating the FS500 for nearly nine months during our visit. At that point, his sawmill was going full speed and he didn’t have time or interest in marketing firewood, so he was just burning it for himself and keeping all those weird end cuts from building up in his logyard.

Still, he had considered the cost of a firewood business and how long it would take to recoup his invest-

ment. “I ran the numbers in hours, not in cords. If I have the opportunity to split for someone else at \$60 per hour, I would be in the black in about 200 hours.” And that’s not factoring in the value of the wood he’s already burning.

“If a potential customer planned to rent a splitter in this area, it would cost about \$14 an hour with a two-hour minimum, plus they would have to factor in time to pick it up and return it,” he explains. “For a property owner with some wood to split, that in itself can be a hassle. But I could pull in and work for a couple hours and split several cords of the customer’s own firewood for \$120 with no hassle for them.”

Though he didn’t start out to run a firewood business, his new log splitter clearly has the wheels turning for Clifford at Curly Burly Milling. ■

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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