



Japa 365 Pro

“Fire has brought people together since we lived in caves. It has provided warmth and security, cooked our food, and made memories,” asserts Joe Nay, philosopher and owner of Ohio Woodburner Ltd., near Cortland, Ohio. “Most firewood producers sell firewood for heat—but I sell it for warmth. Our logo, Family, Friends, Firewood, says it all,” he continued. “I had long said that if I am going to start a business, it wouldn’t be a simple copy of what everyone else is doing. I want to be exceptional—the best—distinctive in my industry.”

Above: Japa 365 Pro owner Joe Nay says that the speed, compact size, and quality of firewood make it an ideal machine for his firewood business.

I spent 22 years in the corporate world, and my last job wanted to move me to the Philippines, but my dad was in declining health”, Joe said. “Two years ago, I took a sabbatical from my career to make firewood with him. I was already cutting about 30 cords a year with a chain saw and firewood splitter, so we bought a small firewood processor and went into business. That lasted two years. Dad passed away last fall. The plan was to go back to my day job, but the firewood business was taking off, and I had 11 restaurants that I was selling firewood to. The firewood processor I had was a great machine, but not a good fit for my business, so last year I attended the Ohio Paul Bunyan Show knowing exactly what I was looking for.”

According to Joe, the Japa 365 Pro firewood processor has a number of features that make it ideal for his business. “I was at the Paul Bunyan Show and I had worked out the market and business model. I determined that I needed a small machine with an adjustable 8-way wedge so I could cut the smaller pieces requested by my customers.” Also on his list were some very specific requirements. He wanted a fixed infeed log stop for consistent log length. The machine needed to be self-loading, picking logs up from the ground to avoid the need for a Bobcat loader. With three log yards, Joe needed a highway-capable, portable firewood processor, self-

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Joe checks the chain tension on the 15-inch cutoff saw. A safety switch shuts down all saw and splitter movement when the cover is open.

powered (as opposed to tractor PTO power), easy to set up, and able to handle logs up to 14 inches in diameter. It had to be compact to fit into the limited space of his log yards and process wood from right to left in order to keep the logs out of the mud. That pretty well narrowed it down to the Japa 365 Pro.

Manufactured in Finland, Japa firewood processors have been in production since 1977, but the 365 Pro was a new model, and Joe would be only the third owner in the U.S. With so much riding on the decision, it was fortunate that he was in the right place to talk directly with a representative from Metsa Machines (the North American importer) and Japa company owners who were attending the show. Convinced that the machine would meet

his needs, he made the purchase.

Joe noted that there are a few differences between U.S. firewood processors and their European counterparts. “The American machines are heavier, while the European machines are more like a laser beam—very exact and precise.” Instead of muscling the logs onto it, he found that the Japa requires finesse. He put it this way: “Most American firewood processors are built like a 1972 Chevelle with a 454, and the Japa is more like a Ferrari. Both are fast machines, but you don’t drive them the same.” He also noticed that the European firewood processors tend to be more fuel efficient because of the high cost of fuel and have higher safety standards. “When I got the Japa, the first thing I was going to do was disable the safety on the hood,” he recalled, “but I changed my mind when I saw how fast that ram moves into the wood. I believe in all the safety features.” “The trailer package is great,” he continued. “It is so well balanced on the axle I can move it on hard ground by hand.” At the log yard, the infeed conveyor telescopes out and lowers in place with a winch. The outfeed conveyor also folds out. The fender and lights are removable, so they won’t get damaged while using the machine.

The control system is a single joystick that, according to Joe, is almost like playing a video game. The joystick rides in a T-shaped notch and is easily operated right-handed or left-handed. At the top of the notch and to the left advances the log infeed. An adjustable steel plate stops the log in the required location. Pulling the lever to the bottom of the notch activates the 15-inch hydraulic cutoff saw while a cam pushes the log stop back so the cut piece falls straight down into the splitting chamber. Pushing the lever forward raises the saw and starts the splitting cycle. Joe says he was surprised at the speed of the Japa 365 Pro. With a Honda 690 engine turning a 2-stage hydraulic pump, the ram moves rapidly until the wood hits the wedge, drops down to a slower high-pressure/low-volume mode to do the grunt work, then retracts quickly. This quick cycle speed is especially noticeable when cutting the 16-inch-long pieces he sells to restaurants. “It is incredibly fast. I can run a full cord of wood through the 8-way wedge on this processor in about an hour and a half all by myself. To demonstrate this, Joe posted a



Right: The Japa 365 has a number of thoughtful features, such as a removable fuel tank with a quick coupler.

The electric-over-hydraulic controls are easy to learn and use. From left to right, they are: manual splitter control, cutoff feed rate, wedge height, and cutoff/ autocycle split/ log infeed.

YouTube video showing a 7-inch-diameter by 15-foot log being put through the 4-way wedge in 1 minute, 6 seconds for an average cycle time of 5.5 seconds.

He has found, however, that his machine doesn't always muscle through knots and forks. Usually, he says, he can adjust the log or turn it around for an easier split. The narrow infeed belt caused some issues with crooked logs at first, but once he learned how to trim them, it was no problem. "I do spend more time prepping the logs, but it saves time in the processing," he explained. The logs come in up to 25 feet long, so they need to be cut roughly in half before he can run them through the processor. To maximize production, he marked his tape measure to account for saw kerf and come out on even, 16-inch lengths, so he doesn't waste any wood when he trims for length. While the processor can handle up to 14-inch-diameter logs, Joe says that 8 to 10 inches is optimal for the Japa 365 Pro. "If they're too big for the processor, I pull out my chain saw and split them on my Super Split."

The log loader is another feature that is a little different from most American firewood processors. Instead of lifting arms that come out and up, it swings up the log sideways so that it stays close to the machine. In addition to saving room, it puts less side stress on the frame, and Joe says he thinks it is safer than conventional lifting arms, especially if there is a second person working with him. "I hire a couple of high school kids who come help. I pay them by the cord to stack firewood in the drying yard and when



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The Japa 365 PRO is self-powered and highway legal for towing. The Honda 690 engine powers the hydraulics for all main functions. Owner Joe Nay estimates that, operating solo, he can process a cord of wood in an hour and a half.



making deliveries. We are working toward efficiency but stacking still takes time. For drying, it needs to be in a single row facing north/south so that the sun hits both sides and air can pass through it.

“There is a market not getting met,” Joe explained. “The majority of people in the firewood business sell it as a commodity for home heating— cheap, but in large volume.” Joe’s approach is to market, cut, and deliver firewood as a value-added product allowing him more profit per cord. He sells his firewood to restaurants and homes for ambience. As he puts it, “I don’t sell it for heat, I sell it for warmth.” This is a high-end market, requiring the wood to be consistent size and clean with no mud, fungus, or insects. “I sell a good-looking stack of firewood, seasoned for at least a year—white oak takes two years, but there’s not a better-looking stack of wood. I try to guess what I’ll be selling in a year or two.” Joe’s value-added firewood service includes delivery in quantities as small as 1/6 of a cord and burlap bags of kindling—all at a premium price.

Providing clean, seasoned firewood of consistent size is only part of the service Joe provides his customers. Whether the customer orders 2 cords or 1/6 cord (a stack of 16-inch firewood 4 feet long, 4 feet high) he will, for a price, deliver and stack the wood. It is important to have the wood available when it is needed, and to be prompt in delivery, he noted. This, along with a professional image, respect for the customer’s property, and neatly stacked piles, sets his business apart from the part-time firewood cutters who operate out of the back of a pickup truck. Joe estimates that he retains 90% of all his customers—mostly restaurants that serve wood-fired pizza or use the wood fire for atmosphere. Although Joe’s plans to hire more staff and invest in more equipment have been delayed because of COVID-19, he has maintained production and is confident that, with time, things will open up again, and he will be ready to meet his customers’ demands for firewood.

Finding new ways to add value to his wood is an ongoing endeavor for Joe. In addition to the firewood itself, he packages smaller pieces for kindling in burlap bags with his company logo printed on the outside. Another new market for his business is bundled firewood. “I recently bought a Twister firewood bundler, had a label designed, and got a UPC bar code,” he explained. “You can really increase price per cord when it is wrapped, but it is a different market, so we’ll see how it works. My hope is that it will encourage people who otherwise wouldn’t burn wood.”

Drawing from his experience in the corporate world, Joe recognizes the importance of getting his name out where people can find it. Even though his business operates in northeast Ohio’s



The cutoff saw uses a standard 15-inch bar and chain, with an external oiler. A positive log stop gives consistent lengths, and the adjustable hydraulic wedge allows for Joe to make consistent-size firewood.

Mahoning Valley, his website and Facebook page have been key to his firewood sales. “My customers are high end, often tech savvy. I’m not a computer nerd, but I put the website together myself and optimized it to come up first when potential customers search for firewood.” His website shows neatly stacked wood and steak sizzling on a wood-fired grill. He also posts pictures of the restaurants that use his firewood. “When they see that I sell wood to the restaurants where they eat, it gives me credibility,” he explained. Joe believes this will be the new business model for selling firewood. “People say they can’t make money selling firewood, but last year, I sold under 120 cords and made a decent living. I’m not volume; I’m margin, using value-added to increase income per cord.” Not that Joe wouldn’t like to up the volume next year. “My business model is based on 200 cords per year, though I may come up a little short, because the virus has slowed things down some.”

As for financing, Joe says he “bootstrapped” the business. “I owe no money. Except for the house and food on the table, everything goes back into the company. I have to buy inventory. I have to be as strategic with money and sales as possible. The goal is to have less sweat equity, so the processor was a high priority. Trucks and other equipment will come later.”

Joe’s advice to anyone considering a firewood business is simple: “You have to know how to sell, have a customer base, and learn how to maximize the value of every cord you produce and sell it as a value-added product. Sell smaller quantities and a higher-quality product. Emphasize that it isn’t a chunk of wood for heat; it is atmosphere.” To show his commitment to long-term sustainable forest management, Joe recently partnered with the organization One Tree Planted (onetreepanted.org). “With every delivery, I sponsor a tree to be planted.” The warmth he delivers now includes the warm fuzzy feeling of contributing to a world-wide reforestation effort. ■



Joe says his two daughters, 16 year old Abbey (left) and 19 year old Emily are efficient Japa operators, freeing him up to load logs and keep the outfeed flowing smoothly.

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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