



LogMaster

Model LM 4

The town of Battle Ground, Washington, exudes a wonderful atmosphere with its old stores and townspeople enjoying the skate park or walking the trails. Mt. St. Helens peeked through the forests every now and again as I wound through the rural countryside toward my destination sawmill. There were several other small-scale sawmills along the same road, but as I rounded the corner and saw a log yard full of character wood, I knew I had found NW Hardwood.

It has been less than two years since Mike Warren came back from Iraq and he and his father, Reggie, decided to start an entirely new business. Mike had saved up quite a bit and Reggie had another business going, but now they could not imagine doing anything else. Combine that enthusiasm with some fortunate encounters with like-minded people and the dream turned into a reality.

The first order of business to establish NW Hardwood was to buy a sawmill and learn to operate it. Reggie and Mike drove down to Nacogdoches, Texas, a little over a year ago, hooked up to their new LogMaster LM 4 mill, and then drove the 4-ton machine back home to Washington state. Being straightforward individuals, they jumped right into the milling of custom lumber and began looking for new ways to employ their new mill. They had received adequate instruction on the operation of the LogMaster and when asked about it, had very few comments on the learning curve. Each had developed his own style of operation, and each had his own list of likes and dislikes of certain techniques.

This specialty forest products business is focused on music wood.

Bolts are shipped worldwide to an appreciative clientele that understands the value of these figured woods that, when treated correctly, provide exceptional music qualities. Much of this wood is maple, all figured in one way or another, with fiddle back or flame grain, fully burlled or with combinations of figure. With the various grain configurations of these figured woods, we can imagine the problems that could be encountered in drying. When Mike said that if they told me how they get this wood to behave in the kiln, they will have to kill me, I decided to

pass on the kiln tour.

Their log yard is a half acre, sorted by species, and according to Reggie and Mike, it has been a roaring two years of putting together a team, a plan, and a unique system of equipment and tools for the special products they produce. The company now consists of four individuals. Mike describes Jim Miller as “a logger and a half,” or more than just another person on the team, as it is Jim’s job to locate burly or other figured woods in the valleys to the north and east, climbing into the Cascade Mountains where Mt. St. Helens



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puffs away every now and again. “Jim is our unsung hero,” says Mike.

While Jim Miller locates and cuts most of the specialty wood they process, the sources of the logs are varied. Many of the specialty woods come from trees cut by arborists in urban areas. Some logs come from private land under contract or from area loggers who know the type of wood the Warrens want and set aside pieces that may have unique value. According to Reggie, some general interface areas where cities run onto the forests contain all sorts of specialty trees, and when necessary, they use a 24k trailer and their Bobcat 300 loader to fetch the logs.

They recently hired Dallas Saterdal, their office manager, who runs the storefront and shipping facility in Battle Ground proper. Dallas takes care of paperwork and shipping as well as her young son, Gabriel, who usually accompanies her to work.

The LM 4

The LogMaster mill is the center of the operation, with a nearby dehumidification kiln built into a stainless shipping container. The NW Hardwood team has milled many species, including alder, ash, cedar, redwood, walnut, maple, and elm. On the day I arrived, there was a good-sized white oak log being sawn. Both Reggie and Mike run the mill, and their experiences with the LogMaster have been good. Their LM 4 has a 51-hp Cat diesel engine, which was a major influencing factor in their purchase, as they said it had “a great power-to-price ratio.” In their business of figured hardwoods, both Reggie and Mike agree that there is no more important factor than power to the blade. They run 1.5-inch blades, hydraulically tensioned to about 5,000 pounds. Mike feels that this tension provides them

Left: Power and a tight blade make for nice cuts in hardwoods.

Portable	Yes, tandem axle
Mill weight	7,500 lbs.
Max log diameter	36 in.
Max width of cut	28 in. (between the guide rollers)
Bed length	32 ft.
Log bed material	3 in. x 6 in. x 1/4 in. thick tubing
Max cutting length	25 ft.
Min thickness of final cut	1 in.
Band wheel diameter	30 in.
Band wheel surface	Steel
Band width recommended	1 1/2 in.
Blade guides	Roller guides, greasable
Band tensioning	Hydraulic with gauge
Front and rear band wheel bearing support	2 in. drive shaft
Clamping	Hydraulic
Number of clamps	1, hydraulic cylinder
Number of log stops	2, hydraulic cylinder

with their straight cuts as well as a good feel for the wood and for adjustments in their cutting speeds. While I watched, Reggie quartered a large white oak log and they cut boards 13 inches wide and 10 feet long in about 25 seconds. The Warrens sharpen their own blades and keep at least 20 on hand.

At the heart of the operation there is evidence of the normal Northwest wet weather, with a log yard fairly churned into mud by the Bobcat skid loader. There are plans to build a saw building and lay out the log yard to better feed the mill, but I’ve got to hand it to these guys for just sticking with the program. The mill is set up outdoors, with no cover, and didn’t look all that spanky, but it is used often, and mostly on challenging woods. The factors that determine how much the sawmill is run are primarily the kiln space and the outfeed rates for materials being sold. There are a lot of character logs in the yard, all destined to be sawed for their highest value. Many of the logs are regular lengths of 10 feet or 16 feet, but the truly special figured wood

Log clamping	Hydraulic cylinder
Log loading	3 log loading arms
Toe boards	2 hydraulic rolling
Remote operator station	Standard
Board drag back	Standard
Networks	Standard
Log turner	Chain
Carriage feed	Hydraulic
Clean side cut	Yes
Power	51-hp Cat, with side load bearing protection for diesel engine and industrial clutch
Base Price	\$34,500
Options	Debarker and the PLC computer networks

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The LogMaster is fully hydraulic with protected lines.

comes in bolt lengths of multiples of just 28 inches. While figure can come and go in a tree, finding these specialty bolts often results in very short pieces of wood that are difficult to process and handle.

While the LM 4 LogMaster mill is essentially a stock product, a few things on the mill have been modified or replaced, like switches or the drag chain. The Warrens find the mill easy to repair and just wish the jacks were stouter and the chains were U.S. spec. No other modifications were made to make

the mill function with the short or otherwise unwieldy logs, as the combination of log dogs and hydraulic clamping was sufficient to hold everything in place. The Warren team reports good experiences with their LogMaster sawmill and good customer support.

Details

The LogMaster LM 4 mill is capable of handling 36-inch-diameter logs, with a 24-foot milling capacity. The Warrens use a Bobcat skid steer to do their log loading, rather than the included log loader. They no longer do much, if any, portable work. When they did move the mill for custom work, they found it easy to tow with their one-ton truck and easy to set up as long as the ground was fairly level. The mill is fully hydraulic for all functions such as raising and lowering the head and running the log roller chains and haul back. It has two hydraulic log clamps and two manual log clamps, as well as two auxiliary slider clamps that can be pulled into any position where extra clamping is necessary.

The Warrens have found the hydraulic log clamps work well, although they don't always move evenly.

One of their favorite features is the laser-eye networks, which the Warrens find perfectly accurate and easy to maintain. The LogMaster networks are fairly unique, in that they operate with laser light through a punched plate with precisely punched holes that determine where the sawmill indexes. It is the ultimate in simplicity with basically no moving parts, relying on just the incidence of light at a certain point to activate the mechanism.

Marketing

Dallas handles the marketing end of the business. She takes photos of each piece of wood they produce, describes the figure and other distinguishing features, and uploads them onto eBay. Although they have been very successful with their online marketing approach,



Reggie Warren with music wood bolts.

they are also implementing an actual storefront showroom for local craftspeople. In this separate location, there are several post-milling machines and operations dedicated to finishing the beautiful bolts of specialty woods. There is a Young and Chang table saw, a large Dewalt radial arm saw, a Grizzly 20-inch planer, and a Cantek resaw is on its way. Many of these machines came from a company that salvaged the equipment from a Fender guitar plant closing.

Conclusion

Before coming out to research this review, I did not know what to expect of this company, but I'm happy to report that it turned out to be a fabulous introduction to this specialty business. With the great potential that exists for the specialty wood products business, it is easy to see how a crew like this can thrive. With a specialty cutter in the woods, the father and son team running the mill, and an e-skilled person running the office and shipping department, this specialty music wood business has come into its own. ■

Mark Havel is an Oregon forest landowner, engineer, product and equipment developer, and may be remembered as the founder and manufacturer of Future Forestry Products Inc. log arches and pruning equipment. That line is now manufactured by Logrite Tools. He operates an engineering business, www.haveldesigns.com, as well as a forest stewardship education model under the character of Forest Dan, www.forestdan.com.

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