



A Cat tradition

B.C.'s Lind Logging has a long tradition of running Caterpillar equipment—and that tradition is continuing, with the logging outfit now running the first Cat 555D skidder in Canada, after having been involved in helping Cat design features into their new D series skidders.

By Paul MacDonald

G R (Mac) Lind Logging of Princeton, British Columbia, has a long history with Caterpillar equipment—and a history of being willing to try something new to make their operation even more efficient.

Mac Lind did the field follow-ups for the new Cat 525 skidders in the 1990s.

Fast forward to 2014 and Mac's son, Reid, recently did field demos for the new Cat 555D grapple skidder—and has now purchased the first 555D machine in Canada. Reid was also part of a small group of logging contractors from throughout North America who were selected to help Cat design new features into the company's new D series skidders.

“My Dad is a long term Cat guy, so we know the equipment well,” says Reid, who at the age of 35 now runs the day-to-day operations of Lind Logging.

B.C. Cat dealer Finning Canada asked Reid to be part of the logging contractors group, to participate in focus groups, and try out the new D series machines.

“They were looking for someone who runs skidders, as well as owns them,” says Reid. And although Reid is busy overseeing logging operations these days, he started out as a skidder operator while still in his teens, and still gets in the operator's seat, when needed.

Being part of the group involved travelling to Cat operations in Georgia. Reid explained that the first trip back in 2012 involved looking at prototype 535D skidders, with the contractors making suggestions about how the equipment could be improved.

“I wasn't sure how it would work when I first went down there, but they were genuinely interested in what we had to say,” he says. “We all put together our lists of pro's and con's about the equipment. There were way more pro's than con's.” A common comment was improving the accessibility for servicing on skidders.

The Cat people came away from the contractor focus groups with a To-Do list, and some homework to do.

On the second trip, many of the suggestions had been acted on, including improving service accessibility. And the contractors, including Reid, had a chance to try the equipment out. “It was good—the Cat people were responsive, and listened to what we said.” Cat engineers addressed each of the contractors' suggestions individually and systematically, about how changes were made or in some cases, not made, because it would impact the performance of the skidders.



“When we came back down the second time, about 80 per cent of the changes we suggested were made—and with the other 20 per cent, Cat had good reasons why the changes could not be made.”

Translate this into baseball terms, and Cat was batting a very high .800.

“The D Series was developed over the course of 4 ½ years with extensive input from loggers and Cat dealers,” summarized Matt McDonald, product specialist for Caterpillar Forest Products. At every stage of the machine’s development, they provided feedback so Cat could be sure the skidders were going to do what they needed them to do, he added.

The third time down to Georgia, more tweaking had been done, and the equipment was put through the paces, in kind of a mini-demo.

It was a varying group of contractors, and some of them, from the southern U.S., were looking at working with prototypes of the more mid-sized skidders, the 525Ds and 535Ds. The southern contractors work a lot in plantation forests, where the skidding trails are more like well-established country roads.

But in talking with the Cat people, and Brian Mulvihill, director of forest products with Finning, Reid said he wanted to go big with using a new Cat D series skidder—the 275 hp 555D.

When it comes to their logging operations in B.C.’s rugged Southern Interior, what Reid and Mac Lind are looking for are power and size. “From the start, I said to Brian, let’s get the big skidder.”

And Reid was the first one in the cab running the 555D in their operations. “It gets into the steep places that we need to go, and it’s very stable,” says Reid. “For us, big is the way to go.” The large size of the 555D is helpful in keeping the machine stable in the adverse ground they work in.

They also ran another machine, the new 545D in their operations last summer, in some field trials. “We had it working with three processors, and it was a bit challenging for the skidder operators, but they were able to stay ahead of the processors, even though we were working in some small wood.”

At the time this story was being put together, they had not done specific fuel monitoring on the 555D, but Reid expected it would be about the same as the 545C. But even if it is the same, he said, the 555D does quite a bit more in terms of production, so they are ahead in terms of production per litre of fuel consumed.

And they need to keep productivity high, as they can sometimes be working in small wood. This year, they were working in areas with volume of .2 cubic metres per tree, but last year, around Oliver, B.C., to the east, they were working in smaller, .14 cubic metre a tree wood.

They still get some bug wood in the areas they work in. “The mountain pine beetle was kind of hit and miss in this area, and Weyerhaeuser has gone after the bug wood fairly hard,” explained Reid. “There is definitely some bug wood still out there, but overall, the wood is fairly green. And we’re working in areas that also have spruce, balsam and fir. I think we’re going to be doing a lot of fir in the next couple of years.”



While some of the Cat people who visited the Lind Logging operation had been to B.C. before, some had not, and were impressed with how the operation delivered solid timber production in tough slopes, and challenging weather conditions. Equipped with chains, the skidders move around in hip deep snow, and minus-30 Celsius temperatures in the winter months. In the summer, the temperatures can easily be in the high plus-30's. Princeton and the other towns in this part of B.C., such as Lillooet, are often the hot spots, temperature-wise in Canada in the summer months.

The Cat people were especially interested in seeing how the Cat ACERT Tier 4 engine on the 555D performed; results have been good, to date. "We haven't had any troubles with it," says Reid.

Mac Lind is still involved in the logging operation these days; he looks after the right-of-way crew, and runs loader a fair bit. "He's still a part of the business," says Reid.

They've had a right-of-way program going with Weyerhaeuser Princeton that Mac oversees that does five or six loads of logs a day with one buncher, a single skidder, a couple of processors, and a loader.

Reid runs equipment once in a while, but most of his time is taken up managing the business. This year, that involved some extra co-ordinating as the company took over Dennis Cook's logging operation, which involved meshing the operations together, both in terms of people and equipment. That has worked out well, reports Reid.

They now have additional wood volume, and additional people and equipment to do that volume.

On the equipment side, their line-up is mostly Cat equipment: in addition to the new Cat 555D, they have a Cat 535B grapple skidder, a Cat 545C grapple skidder, a Cat 535C grapple skidder, a Cat D6R dozer, a Cat 324D FM loader with a Weldco-Beales power clam grapple, a Cat 320C FM loader with IMAC grapple, a Cat TK741 feller buncher, two Cat 541 bunchers, two Cat 320D processors, a Cat 320D FM processor, and a Cat 320C excavator for roadbuilding work. They also have two Cat graders, a 14M and a 160M.

The expansion included bringing some John Deere equipment into the fold. Their Deere equipment now includes two 2054 processors, a 2154 processor and a Deere 2454 log loader.

"It was a good opportunity to bring on some more volume," says Reid, of purchasing the Cook contracting operations. With the additional wood, they will do around 250,000 cubic metres this year, and possibly upwards of 300,000 cubic metres in 2015.

All of their processors are equipped with Waratah 622 heads, which continue to be proven performers. Their mechanic, Clint Gibson, knows the Waratah heads well, and the Finning mechanics are also right up to speed on the heads.

Lind Logging has a service shop in Princeton, but much of the required work is done in the field, with heavy duty mechanic Clint Gibson and the service truck.

With purchasing the Dennis Cook operation, there is no shortage of work for Lind Logging. In addition to the harvesting they did for the Weyerhaeuser Princeton sawmill on their tenured land, they also did some timber sales for Weyerhaeuser last year, too.



As compared to 20 years ago, in his Dad's day, they have to be a lot more flexible with their logging operations now, says Reid. Back then, the logging areas were more fixed, and loggers pretty much knew where they would be working from one year to the next. But things can change quickly now, and they need to respond—and do so readily. “That’s just the way it is these days—we go with it, and accommodate any changes,” says Reid.

A change on the equipment side is that they recently signed up for Cat Product Link, the company's telematics system. “A big reason why we're doing it is it allows us to monitor fuel consumption, and we want to use that to help out with rates with the mill.” This also helps in determining rates based on actual production rates on the ground, vs. expected production rates on paper. As any logger knows, what's down on paper on a logging plan can differ from actual production due to real time ground conditions, and unexpected issues, such as weather.

Reid, who at 35 is part of the younger generation of loggers in the industry, says they are fortunate in that they have both some longer term, very experienced equipment operators and young guys who have caught on to equipment operation very quickly.

A few of the guys have tried working in the oil patch, and in mining, but they eventually decided they preferred logging.

They have about half-a-dozen equipment operators who are under 30, and a handful of guys who are over 50. “I've had quite a few people comment on how young our crew is—they are surprised at that.”

And Reid himself was pretty young when he took on management of the operation eight years ago, at the age of 27. Reid said he initially did a lot of listening. His Dad, Mac, was there as a resource—as he still is now—and he had a lot of experienced loggers working for them; some of them had worked for Reid's grandfather. These guys had seen it all—and then some, and had lots of experience to share with Reid, and the younger operators.

And it is truly a family affair at Lind Logging. In addition to Reid and Mac, Mac's wife, Lani, and Reid's sister, Courtney Garton, take care of the books and office matters. An uncle of Reid's drives logging truck, as does a cousin. A cousin of Mac's runs the grader. All in, they have about 22 employees.

Reid said their long term relationship with Cat and Cat distributor, Finning, has been a good one—and that through being involved with initiatives such as the D series development, they feel they are directly engaged in equipment design. It reinforces that Cat is always looking at ways of improving their equipment—so contactors such as Lind Logging can improve their logging operations and be more efficient.

They get a high level of service from the nearest Finning branch in Kamloops, and their sales and customer service rep, Trevor Dueck. “They've always looked after us on the parts and service side.”

And having mostly Cat machines works out well on the service side, says Reid. “We have five Cat 320 machines, and it's the same filters, the same everything, and it makes servicing that much simpler. And with the Cat 320 processors, they seem to run forever without any trouble.”