



Dynamic Duo

A Link-Belt carrier/Southstar head combo times two is working out nicely processing wood in B.C.'s Cariboo country, delivering good production numbers—and fuel efficiency.

By Jim Stirling

Like a pair of giant praying mantis, the two log processors worked rhythmically at their respective wood decks, one on the hill's upside, the other on the cusp of the valley's sweep.

The Link-Belt 240X2 working above the road was fitted with a Southstar QS500 processing head. A larger version of the combination, a Southstar QS600 head on a Link-Belt 290X2, was working across the way and having no problems pulling the stems uphill to be processed.

Craig Chapman closely watched the two machines at work. He's the principal in Moffat Falls Contracting, a specialist log processing company based near Williams Lake in British Columbia's Cariboo country. He owns the Link-Belt 240X2 with the Southstar 500 head along with the same model of Link-Belt carrier fitted with a Waratah 622B processing head.

Chapman was also managing the operation of the QS600/290X2 at the site off the Nazko Road west of Quesnel, B.C., on an approximately 35,000 cubic metre licence held by Tolko Industries Ltd.

Chapman reported the Southstar 500 head had clocked about 600 hours of productive operation without any significant hiccups. "So far, so good. It's been a solid performer." He added the Link-Belt in tandem with the Southstar head "produces really good hydraulics and has awesome power."

That is generated by the Link-Belt's 177 hp Isuzu engine which, said Chapman, is proving itself to deliver very favourable fuel efficiency.

"The balance of the head is excellent and it stays level. The operators really like them," continued Chapman.

Part of that is attributable to the Link-Belt's heavy duty undercarriage which by placing a larger amount of the 27.5 inch track shoes on the ground delivers more stability and therefore operator comfort.

Today's sophisticated log harvesters and processors have the ability to multi stem when operating in homogenous sized wood. The Southstar QS500 is no exception. It's been designed with a sturdy frame and four-wide drive rollers to increase the surface area when multi stemming. Southstar says its system offers more traction and less fibre damage as a result.

"I believe the multi stemming ability is definitely an asset," said Chapman. "If you could get into a uniform size stand, well, that would be the ultimate." As it was, in the stand west of Quesnel, operators were able to run two compatible stems at a time approximately 20 per cent of the time, reckoned Chapman.



Single stemming trees to 23 inches-plus in butt diameter was no problem for either of the Link-Belt/Southstar processing combinations. One of the potential concerns around multi stem processing—typically two, occasionally three suitable stems—is the impact on processed log lengths and quality. Licences have strict parameters for both with which logging contractors are obliged to comply.

“Our lengths have been excellent, about 98 per cent,” reported Chapman “Quality really depends on the stands themselves.” He added: “It’s important to have a good crew but these Southstar heads have done real well so far.”

Apparently, getting used to the control feel for the Southstar has not been an issue. “If an operator is a video game player, he catches on right away.”

Although Chapman’s machines have enjoyed a smooth baptism, support for both processing head and carrier has been available in spades. “Inland (Kenworth Parker Pacific, the Link-Belt dealership in Williams Lake and around the province) has given us very good service all along,” vouched Chapman. “And the Southstar guys have been on top of any issues we’ve had and dealt with them.”

Craig Chapman heads up Moffat Falls Contracting, a specialist log processing company based near Williams Lake in British Columbia’s Cariboo country. He owns the Link-Belt 240X2 with the Southstar 500 head (above). “It’s been a solid performer,” says Chapman.

The Southstar line of harvesting and processing heads are relative newcomers to the B.C. scene. The heads are engineered in New Zealand and assembled in Kamloops, B.C. Southstar says its equipment is durable and “built to last.” Chapman would concur that routine maintenance is a breeze on the heads. “The access for maintenance is excellent and well designed in modules. Little things like that help.”

Chapman started concentrating on wood processing operations around 2003. “Prior to that, I did a little bit of everything.” That included diverse skills from working on salvage programs for mills to yarding.

It was while working on an early beetle salvage program for Lignum near Moffat Falls in the Horsefly area of B.C. that he borrowed the location for his company name. Chapman acquired the Link-Belt 240 with the Waratah 622B head about three-and-a-half years ago and the combination continues to do the job well for him.

Chapman said he agonized about making the critical decision to go from a single owner/operator to owning a second machine and the expense implications arising from it. One of the persuading factors was something that didn’t happen. Chapman had worked in a remote area up around Williston Lake, north of Mackenzie. If your one and only machine goes seriously down in that type of area, you can be hooped for days.

“If you have another machine, you can still work, have some revenue coming in,” he reasoned. Cash flow is oxygen for any small business. That, and performance.

The relevance there harkens back to the ability of the Southstar/Link-Belt machine combination to produce quality measured stems. “It means you can produce those quality reports to any new potential employers,” explained Chapman. And that can only help down the line to open opportunity’s door and keep the machines working productively