Going full tilt

New logging operation Full Tilt Contracting is looking forward to doing exactly that—going full tilt—in the not too distant future, helped along by solid logging equipment and an experienced crew.

By Jim Stirling

There’s no passport control at the top of Sheep Creek Hill. But once travelers cross the Fraser River west of Williams Lake and switchback up the hill to the plateau’s lip, they’re entering a different world.

It’s called the Chilcotin and it’s like no other in British Columbia.

The Chilcotin is a blend of open range and grasslands scored by deep river valleys. The plateau is cloaked with forests and bordered in the west by deep lakes and the Coast Mountains. The region is synonymous with small diameter pine, long distances and opportunities for loggers.

The high plateau is frigid in winter and fiery in summer, but offers loggers valuable seasonal harvesting options. The Chilcotin people are different, too: proudly independent and protective of traditional and family values.

When Dustin Chevigny drives up the Sheep Creek Hill in the early morning darkness on his way to work, he represents his own heritage as a fourth generation log harvesting contractor. His dad, David Chevigny, runs Pioneer Logging which has been active for many years in and around Williams Lake and in the Chilcotin.

The younger Chevigny has recently started his own company, the expressively named Full Tilt Contracting. Dustin works as a sub-contractor for Pioneer and actively seeks other opportunities to keep his four main production machines logging and profitable.

“IT was time to jump,” explains the 24-year-old for his entrepreneurial gumption. “It’s been tough but good. I work harder now than when I was an hourly employee and it’s not as simple—what with the worries about log quality, machine upkeep and all the logging phases,” he continues. “But I always wanted to get into more than one logging phase. I have a lot of drive.” And his dad’s assessment? “He’s a good businessman as well as a hard worker.”

Full Tilt Contracting operates a John Deere 2454 loader and an 848 skidder, a Tigercat 822 feller buncher and a Hitachi 210 with a Waratah 622B processing head. “You have to be able to jump at opportunities,” says Chevigny regarding log harvesting equipment acquisitions. “Sometimes they can just float away from you.” He’s unabashedly enthusiastic about Tigercat feller bunchers “In my opinion, there’s nothing better than a
Tigercat cutter. They’re the cream of the cream and they’re Canadian-built. You can’t beat that.” Part of his endorsement undoubtedly comes from the stalwart performance of his 822.

“We’ve got 18,000 hours on the buncher with double shifting it day in, day out.” He credits an additional factor for that. “The Tigercats are purpose built for logging. They’re not construction machines.”

Not to be underestimated in the performance evaluation is the maintenance regime. Chevigny says his buncher receives a full hour of service after each nine-hour production shift. “Those machines go through a lot of torture every day.” Chevigny adds that Tigercat machines have made a big difference to both his company and Pioneer Logging through their uptime and delivery of the best return per cubic metre produced.

Regional equipment dealers play their role keeping Full Tilt’s equipment team performing. They include Inland Kenworth–Parker Pacific in Williams Lake, the local Tigercat dealer; Wajax Equipment in Prince George for the Hitachi processor and he credits Great West Equipment in Williams Lake for maintaining a good inventory of standard machine parts.

Machine operators are the other key ingredient to a productive logging operation and Chevigny credits his whole crew with consistently getting the job-at-hand done well.

Controlling the costs that a logging contractor can influence is elemental to success. But sometimes it can be problematic to implement. “I like being able to try new things. If you can save a dollar and get the job done that has to be a good thing,” he says. “I run lean in the good times.”

Full Tilt Contracting and Pioneer Logging have declared war on traditionally rising fuel costs and strive to reduce fuel consumption wherever practical. Chevigny and Pioneer have switched from heavier duty vehicles to Ford 150 half-tons, with Tidy Tanks where needed, as company pick-up trucks. “They save fuel and they’ve been an awesome pick-up.”

Pioneer’s six wheel drive Tigercat 635 skidder can almost double the payload per turn of a four-wheeled machine and go where the smaller machine can’t, while using only slightly more fuel, points out Chevigny. “It pays off big time.”

Pioneer also runs Link-Belt carriers with Southstar processing heads that deliver further significant fuel savings thanks to the Link-Belt’s 177 hp Isuzu engine. “We try to run as fuel efficient operations as we can,” he summarizes. “Payments and fuel are two big expenses.”

Apart from Full Tilt’s role as a sub-contractor for Pioneer Logging, Chevigny has accepted other challenges. His crew has taken on projects logging privately owned land and bidding on B.C. Timber Sales. One of those was for about 25,000 cubic metres, further west in the Chilcotin, near Tatla Lake during the summer of 2014.
Chevigny says his right hand men, processor operator Greg Charleyboy and buncherman Larry Cahoose, “were willing to work the hours to get the job done.” Whatever the job, Chevigny says producing quality wood is paramount, with 95 per cent to 100 per cent meeting specifications. “We try to keep the mills happy. They are our customers and we want them to be permanent customers, and make a reputation for producing quality wood.”

When the Logging & Sawmilling Journal caught up with Chevigny near the end of the 2014-15 logging season, he was working at a Pioneer Logging show in the Gaspard Creek drainage of the Chilcotin. Most of the efforts were on completing harvesting targets, delivering wood to roadside and processing the logs. In this case it was in four classification lengths from approximately eight to 18 feet for delivery to Tolko Industries. Pioneer has five company-owned logging trucks and employs another five on contract.

Chevigny says he’s optimistic about the future. “I think there are a lot of opportunities in the forest industry for people to get their feet on the ground,” he says. His feet seem firmly planted. He and his wife, Kaylyn, have a new daughter, Aayron, and share a positive outlook.

“Full Tilt logged about 40,000 cubic metres this year. Eighty thousand would be a real nice number for me.” He reckons that translates to about eight loads a day for 10 months a year.

Chevigny hopes he and Full Tilt’s crews can live up to the company name right out of the gate after break up. The optimism is based on what’s been going on this year, helping create a regional appetite for logs. Tolko has upgraded its mills in Williams Lake, as has West Fraser in 100 Mile House and the small Sigurdson Bros., operation lost production through weather issues, he explains. Declares Chevigny with a smile: “I’m looking forward to next season.”