

A Different Kind of Tong Thrower

By Bob Bruce

Apparently there's no such thing as retiring from the logging industry. At least that's the way Bruce Skurdahl of Summit Machinery in Sherwood, Ore., tells it.

"I've been in the winch business since about 1981," he says. "I helped start Allied Power Products in Beaverton, Oregon, and was there for most of 15 years. Then I left and went to work at Jewell Attachments in Portland where I was Sales Manager for close to ten years."

The thing is he also owns a farm in Sherwood, Ore., that has been in the family for nearly 100 years. They raise hazelnuts and cider apples, and Bruce has always spent part of his time running the farm — aalong with everything else.

When he decided to work the family farm full time, he soon discovered that 20 years of timber industry wasn't going to let go of him that easily. "People kept calling me up and saying 'Help me with my winches.'"

The Request

One of those people was Eric Krume, owner of Krume Logging & Excavation out of Castle Rock, Wash. Eric called Bruce asking him to help design a different kind of tong thrower. Actually, it wasn't the first time Eric had made such a request.

"When I was at Jewell, Eric had approached us to build a new kind of tong thrower, but the ones we were doing worked just fine so we figured why mess with success?"

The "traditional" type tong thrower that Jewell had come up with back in the day was developed primarily for loggers in Idaho, according to Bruce. "They called them jammers back then," he says. "They had the winch mounted on the boom, and the cable kind of fair-leaded over the back of the main and the stick."

The Design

All in all it was a good design, but Eric's idea looked like it might work even better. Instead of the winch being an integral part of the machine, it is now a pin-on attachment, which means it is portable from one machine to the next.

Also, the distance from the drum to the slack kicker is much shorter, which according to Bruce, means that the kicker doesn't have to work as hard and can throw the line farther. "If a guy is a pretty decent machine operator, he can pick up throwing tongs in one or two hours and be pretty darn proficient within a week," says Bruce. "The control scheme is very simple, and it's very responsive and easy to operate."

"The big disadvantage to the older jammers based on line machines is that they are limited to sitting on the road. They are flat track, chain drive cranes, and they can't get off the road and go boonie bashing. But with an excavator based tong thrower you can go anywhere you want to go."



The User

Bruce is also a strong believer in the efficiency of a tong thrower for close-in situations. “Over in Idaho around the Boise basin, tong throwers are often the preferred way to log,” he says. “They use them mostly in designated skid trail bunching situations as grapple skidders. Over here in western Washington, Oregon, and California, you see them working around landings, in the corners, and the draws where the wood isn’t worth setting up the big tower or even bringing in a two-drum yoder.”

“Where these machines do best is in the zero-to-300-foot range roadside gullies,” he says, “the deep stuff where you would work your shovel logger too hard and tear the ground up.”

With a tong thrower, it’s very common to skid a log a minute,” he continues. “When used efficiently, there is nothing that’s going to get logs faster, they’re the cheapest logs you’ll get as opposed to doing it with a typical yarding system. I know a lot of guys on the landing don’t want to hear that, but the other way is you’ve got this big machine and six or eight guys standing around not doing anything.”

“With one guy in the machine and a hooker on the ground, you can skid those logs in just as fast or faster. That’s especially the case in thinning or selective logging where you’ve got a lot more rig-up time because you’ve got corridors you’re dealing with and you’ve got to go sideways and things.”

“With a tong thrower you do that first couple hundred feet, and before you know it, you’ve got it all skidded out, and then when you start your corridor work you’ve got wide open country to deal with.”

Self-Contained

If there is one thing that really sets Eric’s design apart from others that Bruce has engineered and brought to market, it is the fact that it is essentially self-contained and can easily be moved from machine to machine, rather than turning the shovel into a purpose-built device good only for tong throwing.

“If you have a conventional tong thrower on your machine,” says Bruce, “and you want to sell the machine and move the thrower from your old machine to a new one, it will cost you a good solid \$30,000 to pull off the equipment and transfer it. With our design, you can take the heel rack assembly off Machine A and put it on Machine B in just a day or two.”

It also makes sense for the occasional job. Bruce says, “Let’s say you’ve just got two or three days of tong throwing on a particular job. If you have to move an entire machine in and out for just three day’s work, who makes money on it? The lowboy guy, that’s who. With this you can haul it out on a car trailer or the back of a log truck, set it on the ground, swap it over, use it, and then bring it back and put it in the barn.”

He continues, “You might not use it for another three weeks or three months, but meanwhile, the heel rack just sits there ready to go, and your shovel goes back to being a shovel.”

The Summit Attachment and Machinery tong thrower are ideal for a 22-ton carrier like a 324 type or 260 class machine. “Hydraulic winches like horsepower,” he says, “and more horsepower is more performance and more speed.”