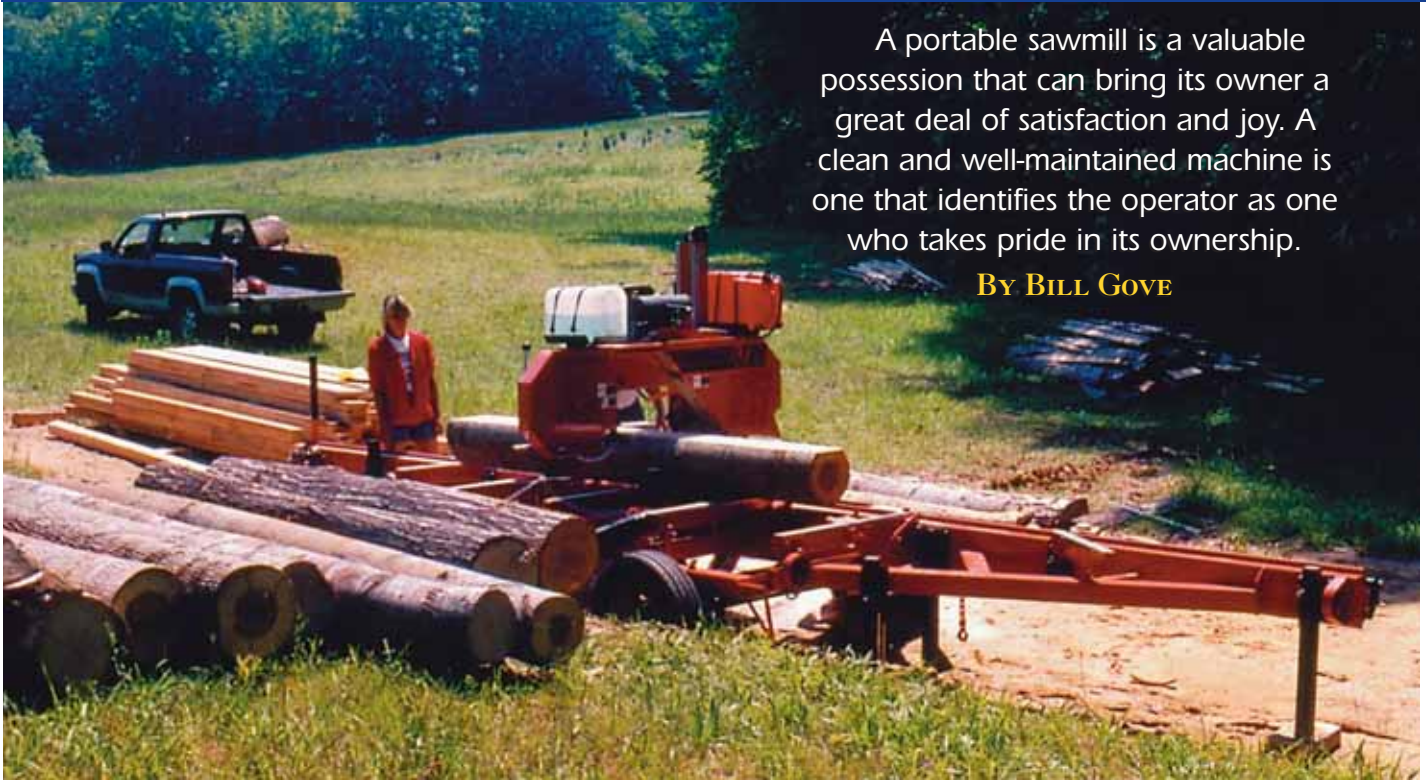


SAWMILL REVIEW

A portable sawmill is a valuable possession that can bring its owner a great deal of satisfaction and joy. A clean and well-maintained machine is one that identifies the operator as one who takes pride in its ownership.

By **BILL GOVE**



Wood-Mizer LT28

Down along the Virginia/North Carolina state line, I visited a proud owner of a Wood-Mizer LT28 sawmill. In a small Virginia hamlet with the unusual name of Buffalo Junction, I met Fred Dickinson. My visit with him provided a glimpse of how a well-kept portable sawmill can be a source of pride for the owner.

A carpenter who works in many phases of construction work, especially finish carpentry, Fred obviously loves to work with wood. About five years ago, he moved from Pennsylvania to the gentle rolling hill country of southern Virginia with its multitude of hardwood and pine woodlots. Operating his sawmill has proven to be an enjoyable sideline for Fred and his wife, as well as a somewhat profitable weekend activity.

Purchased in April 2006, the mill still looked brand new, although Fred has already sawn a large quantity of white and red oak, poplar, beech, and red cedar lumber. His

choice of the LT28 when making his purchase was based on his desire to have a sawmill that was useful for a little more than just an occasional weekend project. But his choice was also a practical decision. Fred is a woodworking enthusiast, who obviously takes his millwork and sawmill maintenance quite seriously.

A Simpler Model

The LT28 does not have all the hydraulic time and energy savers that can be found on the larger Wood-Mizer models, and it is somewhat lighter than the LT40 or LT70. But as Fred found out, the savings on the purchase price compared to a larger model were considerable, plus he definitely prefers the simpler, less complex model.

For example, Fred finds no disadvantage in using the manual crank networks as opposed to an electrically powered one. The manual crank gives him a quick ratio adjustment with the assist of a gas pis-



Fred Dickinson (pictured here) and his wife Val (above) saw 1,000 to 1,200 BF in a five-hour workday with their LT28.

ton. In fact, Fred said, "I wouldn't want automatic networks; I can easily make the set I want now, and I feel that I can do so faster."

Fred also said that he prefers the manual handle for the blade tension activator to a powered one. Again, Fred claims he can activate it just as fast and do so with less variance. He also likes the manual clutch. It is obvious that Fred likes to keep his machinery simple but functional, with fewer things to break down.

Optional Features

I did notice that Fred had chosen some of the optional features for his LT28. The basic LT28 sawmill is equipped with a walk-along manual crank to advance the saw in the cutting operation, but an optional electric power feed is available for this model. This power feed definitely allows the operator to move the sawhead along the log easier and quicker. Fred considered this feature worth the extra cost and installed one. Power for the LT28 is supplied by a Kohler 18-hp gasoline engine.

And there was one other option that Fred decided to include on his LT28—the log deck package. This addition is made up of a manually operated winch, a manually operated log turner, and a toeboard. Choosing this extra log-loading equipment was obviously a wise choice; Fred's one and only assistant is his one and only rugged but petite wife, Val. And Val was turning over some 32-inch oak logs on the log bed, with the help of the manual winch.

A hydraulic log turner is available on the larger Wood-Mizer models but not on the LT28. The manual turner did the job, but with some effort. I was impressed with the stainless steel sleeves on top of the log bunks and how much easier the logs flopped over as they slid along the sleeve.

The optional toeboards are mounted on cross members of the log deck, one at each end, and are used to raise the end of a tapered log by means of a hand crank. The toeboard worked fine for Fred, but not with small logs. The top edge of the toeboard needs to extend back in a level fashion almost to the log stop, eliminating a pocket into which the partially sawn small log might sag.

A Very Satisfied Customer

Fred's only non-positive comments were a couple of suggestions about some very minor improvements he would like to see. For example, he would prefer that the control valve

Wood-Mizer LT28

Length	26 ft. 2 in.
Width	6 ft. 6 in.
Height	8 ft. 5 in. (saw head at max. height)
Weight	2,420 lbs. (with heaviest power options)
Max. log length	21 ft.
Max. log diameter	32 in.
Production rate	Up to 200 BF per hour
Power	18-hp gas, Kohler
Blades	0.042 in. x 1.25 in.
Feed system	Hand crank
Up/down of head	Hand crank

OPTIONS

Log deck package	Log turner, winch and toeboards (all manual)
Power feed	(electric)
Price Basic Mill	\$11,130
Power feed	\$1,375
Log deck package	\$825

MANUFACTURER

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MFGR'S COMMENTS

The LT28 is a manual mill designed for wood enthusiasts who want to saw part-time for hobby or to supplement their income. Introduced in 2005, the LT28 features the LT15 head design on the basic Industrial LT40 saw bed. With the power feed option available on this sawmill model, the LT28 has steadily gained popularity among part-time users who want the portability and ease of setup that our full monorail mill designs offer.

for the water line be moved to the other side of the machine, where the operator can reach it without having to walk around. And he got a little annoyed at the tight space inside of the blade housing when he was cleaning out the sawdust.

However, those observations did not in any way indicate dissatisfaction with his LT28. In a five-hour

workday Fred and his wife are able to saw at least 1,000 board feet of hardwood lumber, sometimes 1,200 board feet. He feels that for an operator doing the kind of work he does, the LT28 is just the right size. His boss on the construction job has a larger sawmill with many of the hydraulic frills, but has recently told Fred that he now prefers the "sim-



Fred decided to include the log deck package – a manually operated winch, a manually operated log turner, and a toeboard.



Operating their sawmill has proven to be an enjoyable and somewhat profitable weekend activity for Fred and Val.

pleness” of a machine like the LT28. Fred told me, “I don’t need all those extra things. I saved over \$10,000 by not buying a larger sawmill, and I bought a Kubota tractor with the savings.”

A Well-Maintained Machine

So, I left the hamlet with the unlikely name of Buffalo Junction with a definite impression that the Wood-Mizer LT28 was an excellent sawmill for a part-time operator like Fred Dickinson. It’s not too expensive and not too overloaded with extras, yet is big enough to do the job.

Since my visit Fred has built a 14 x 26 roof over the machine, yet he still wipes it clean after every use. Not all operators take such care, of course. Shortly after my visit with Fred, I happened to stop at the site of another LT28 owner in another state. The contrast was unbelievable. The owner had only had the mill for about seven months, but the rust, lack of maintenance, and very sloppy setup made me decide to leave the camera in my car.

A portable sawmill, when provided with proper maintenance and operation, can be a huge source of pride for the owner. ■

Bill Gove is retired from a forestry career with private industry and with state government as a wood utilization specialist and lives in Williamstown, Vermont. He is a regular contributor and is the author of several books on the history of railroading and logging.