

McKnight's Titan

South-west Scotland contractor Mark McKnight has decided there's something to be said for buying new machines after all.

"If the operator is happy, then the contractor is happy," said Mark McKnight. The operator he is referring to is his nephew Joe, and the reason for Joe's happiness is the recently acquired Titan 8H 18 tonne harvester, which arrived in January and now has 320 hours on the clock.

Mark McKnight has a variety of machines: five Ponsse harvesters, and five Valmet forwarders plus one Rottne. This is the first Logset, but it won't be the last according to Mark.

There were a number of machines on the shortlist, and Logset wasn't the front runner, but it was Logset's flexibility and willingness 'to go the extra mile' (to use Mark McKnight's words) that cemented the deal. Being accustomed to a different make of machine, there were a number of small details that didn't feel quite right on the demonstrator Logset which Joe drove for a number of weeks last year. Having already placed their order with Logset, Mark and Joe went to the factory in Finland and listed no less than 18 points that they wanted changed. The fact that Logset agreed to address every single one after already winning the order is something that impressed the McKnights greatly.

The points in question included foot-rests in the cab, which made Joe feel more comfortable when

harvesting on slopes, extra toolboxes at the front of the cab, and hose guards on the bogie rams.

The first thing Joe noticed about the Logset when he began operating the demonstrator was the good view from the cab. This makes travelling over stumps and difficult ground much easier, since the wheels are always clearly visible.

The Titan 8H is powered by a SisuDiesel Citius 74 CTA engine. Its fuel efficiency is further enhanced by the IQAN management system which ensures that demand is proportional to the task in hand. One point that particularly caught Joe McKnight's attention was the fact that the demonstrator machine was running at just 40°C during last year's heat wave.

The Titan has already proved its ability as a climber in the course of the current contract, its bogie rams ensuring good contact with the ground at all times. This system is also advantageous on soft ground, and according to Logset, the bogies are able to float over soft ground, rather than burrowing their way into it as can happen with some systems.

Joe McKnight seems particularly impressed by the 8L head, which he notes is very strong, with good protection in vulnerable places to prevent damage to hoses and fittings. It can fell and grip bigger trees than the head he used previously. The



Mark McKnight (left) with nephew Joe who operates the Titan 8H.

privately owned site, managed by Tilhill, on which the harvester is currently working has eleven and a half to twelve thousand tonnes of Sitka on it, some 40 years old. Average tree size is .61 cubic metres, with a large pocket of trees significantly exceeding this size. Kronospan is taking 60% of this for palletwood. This is taken to Carlisle to be loaded onto the train to Chirk. The rest is taken by Howies and BSW.

The 8L head has an 82cm bar, enabling it to single-cut big stems. It has three feed wheels, four feed motors and seven knives. The Synchro-Knife system means the top finishing knives move in sync with the main top knives.

The sawbox on the 8L is designed in such a way that the head is particularly good at handling flared butts, and Mark McKnight says the new head has meant that he has been able to reduce his reliance on

chainsaw operators by some 30%. Toeing in has proved unnecessary with the 8L.

There was also a pile of windblow at the top of the site that had lain there for a year. The branches had dried and hardened in that time, but the Titan was able to lift the stems clear and delimb them without difficulty.

The head is governed by Logset's patented SuperCut 100 system, and is very good on bar, chains and chain oil. Chain oil is delivered proportionally to the movement of the bar.

The Titan is available with GPS and data transfer, but, "You don't need these to cut 3 metre chip," as Mark McKnight puts it. Instead the machine uses a Motomit IT running a timber optimisation program.

Anyone who has been up close to a Titan harvester will know that it has number of clever design fea-



Newly appointed Managing Director of Logset Ltd, Dave Wileman, with Customer Support / Service Coordinator Shaun Harper who joined the company from Andersons of Hardhills. (Right) The 8L head has a third feed wheel in the centre which is powered by two feed motors.





(Left) The 8H harvester is fitted with a Loglift 220 10 metre parallel crane. (Right) The new 8L head.

tures intended to make life easier for the operator. With experience of many machines down the years, Mark McKnight marvels at the compartments in which the operator can keep his toolkit (which always remains warm, dry and clean) as well as chains and greasing equipment. The rear storage compartments open to form steps to improve access to the machine, and the front urea box opens to make a platform or work surface.

One final touch has yet to be added to the harvester. A sticker stating: '240 horses and one donkey' is about to be applied.

Mark McKnight started in forestry as a mechanic, spending ten years working for the Forestry Commission at Heathhall in Dumfries followed by two years at Logmec, which was then managed by Stewart Paul.

In 1994 he started Timber-Tech Engineering and he worked as a mobile mechanic, mainly on Valmets, but also on Bruunett,

Kockums and Lokomo machines. He did a lot of work in Ireland for Valmet, where he bought 'bits of a Bruunett 678'. He rebuilt the machine in 1996, getting a Keto 100 head from Kenny Dobson at Logset. He says he, "Just drifted into harvesting," spending his early days working on Buccleuch Estate, where he still works to this day. However his company has been called Timber-Tech Harvesting since last year, and they no longer offer a machine repair service.

The fact that he has a mechanic's background means that, unlike some contractors, Mark doesn't panic when something breaks, according to Joe. "Everything breaks at some point," says Mark. "It's just how easy and quick it is to get it repaired that matters."

Not much has broken on the 8H in the short time he has had it – just some O-rings on a stop valve which Mark sorted himself, and a cable on the measuring encoder, which

Shaun Harper fetched out the very same day.

Shaun joined Logset from Andersons of Hardhills, whose stint as a Logset dealer officially ends in June. In a change of direction for the company, they have decided to concentrate on agricultural sales.

Shaun's job title with Logset is Customer Support Service Co-ordinator, and his duties include making routine visits to customers to ensure they are satisfied and are getting the level of service they expect.

When it comes to forwarders, Mark McKnight seems to be of the persuasion that Rottne is the machine to beat. He took delivery of a 16 tonne SMV Rapid towards the end of last year. It was the first brand new machine he had ever bought. Previously he had taken the view that with his mechanic's background he could sort out any problems, but now that he has got a dozen machines, he's decided that the time has come for someone else

to look after some of them.

The SMV is the fourth Rottne Mark McKnight has owned. Previously he ran an F9, an F12 and an F14. The SMV is fitted with 30.5 inch wheels – unusually large for a machine of its size – and this and the machine's long bogies greatly enhance travel over difficult terrain. "Loading and pulling capacities are both excellent for what we're doing," he adds. The Tier III John Deere engine is a great improvement over the previous Tier II version

Mark has also been pleased by the price of spares from both Logset and Wilsons. He asked Logset for a list of 30 typical spare parts and found that it was 25 to 30% cheaper than some sources. He has also discovered that he can get spares for his other older machines through Rottne – axle parts for instance, such as half-shafts, gears, seals, diff lock mechanisms, for much less than he would pay elsewhere.



(Left) Another happy operator: Murray 'the Kek' Crosbie who operates the 16 tonne Rottne Rapid SMV. "I've driven a fair few forwarders," he says, "but I've never driven anything that matches the Rottne on a hill. And it's solidly made – you never see the fitters." (Right) Murray loading pole lengths on the SMV.