

Chainsaw Review

Simon Bowes presents his annual chainsaw roundup

The annual chainsaw feature usually reports on new saws, old saws and minor technical developments, but for 2010 a major new innovation has hit the chainsaw dealerships.

Husqvarna have recently launched their new 576 AutoTune model and I was lucky enough to be one of the first to use it. I heard about this saw last year when I reviewed the 576 X-Torq which is a good saw in itself, but it carries the baggage associated with the slightly complex low emission engine that is soon to be widely employed by more than just Husqvarna.

In actual fact, the scavenging engine is not actually so complex after all, but with its multi-port barrel and tricky carburettor it is daunting to the chainsaw pilot who could strip down a conventional saw with an 8mm box spanner and two Allen keys. Both the 576 Husky and Stihl's MS 441 are powerful, smooth and reliable, but prone to being a little finicky to tune. It seems to be a common affliction with these engines that they need a bit of coaxing to get them to warm to the task when they are started from cold or when they have been run out of fuel. It can take a few pulls of the starter rope to bring these low emission engines to life.

Once started it is the tremendous amount of torque that is surprising, coupled with the exceptionally high top speed of what are fairly big capacity saws. I have run an MS 441 for more than a year and it has been so good that I resigned myself to putting up with the breathless cold starts and the fact that it needs a really good tug to get it going after a fill up. The Husqvarna 576 I tested last year displayed similar traits but the 576 AutoTune has left these

little annoyances behind. It starts easily and first time from cold, it runs straight up to top revs without coaxing and it feels just like a brand new saw every time you pick it up.

This would appear to be game, set and match to Husqvarna but I have received word that Stihl will be delivering an MS 441 C-M to the Bowes domicile for testing in the near future. This new machine from Stihl is bristling with technology that allows it to tune itself to match temperature, altitude, fuel quality – and it has a memory! I will also be testing the new MS 362 which is the four-port version of the trusty and much admired MS 361. This is a saw I have been waiting for ever since the MS 441 appeared. The MS 361 is a superb saw, but replace its conventional engine with a low emission, high torque, four-port one similar to that employed in the bigger MS 441 and it should be something else.

So Husqvarna and Stihl have the chainsaw world all to themselves with new innovation and technological advances in abundance? Not quite.

Solo have reappeared with a new range of machines that are more conservative but with attributes that will attract the interest of users who want quality and a comfortable familiarity in their machines. Echo have produced a new model that has impressed with good power and smoothness. Makita continue to grow a following with a range of robust saws built with more than a touch of quality, and Efco provide a mixture of both new ideas and just plain good equipment.

There is a wider range of choice than ever before for anyone looking to buy a new professional chainsaw,



New from Stihl, the MS 441 C-M complete with microprocessor.

from simple conventional machines to the cutting edge of technological advancement. It's just a shame that the number of people using these machines is dwindling fast and the future has never looked so grim for our little industry. Oh how I wish I could have had the choice of equipment on offer now when I was a full-time faller, and how I wish contracting rates were still what they were 30 years ago!

As Solo seem to have risen Lazarus-like from a period of absence in the UK market, and we have been testing a new machine with the Solo name, it is with this German company that I will start this year's review.

Solo

The Solo range of groundcare equipment is now imported into the UK by Lely, based in St Neots.

The machine we have tested, and will be featuring in a future issue, is the Solo 665 that falls into the important 60-70cc size range. The 665 is 65.9cc but here things become slightly familiar, as the three saws 665, 675 and 681 that form a large part of the Solo professional range all share the same chassis with just the capacity changing. We have seen this before with another German manufacturer but these are different machines as the Solos all use the 'four-port'

scavenging engine that is becoming familiar to more users as time goes on. Consequently, as I will report in my test of the Solo 665, the performance is truly outstanding and on a par with much more illustrious brands.

Equipment on the Solo 665 isn't compromised either. A tool-less top cover is common throughout the range as are steel AV spring mounts and a big air cleaner. Side chain tensioners and a decompressor are also used. The finish of the machines is good and the all important feel is enhanced by the cutting equipment being familiar – and operators will doubtless use Oregon aftermarket cutting attachments.

Solo's new range of saws is well worth looking at for the power and feel of the machines, and with Lely providing spares backup through their Toro dealers network they stand a good chance of becoming a real alternative to the established choices.

www.lely.com

www.solo-germany.com

Echo

The only non-European manufacturer, these saws have always been superbly built but the professional saws in the range were always a little bit staid and old fashioned. The CS510 is a newer machine that, at just under 50cc, has found popularity with users in amenity/small thin-



(Left to right) The 665 model from Solo gives outstanding performance. Makita's now familiar 64cc DCS6401. The CS600 from Echo is aimed at the professional forestry user.



ning jobs.

Echo have moved out of the arb and amenity area into professional forestry with a new saw introduced quite recently, the CS600. This is a high quality 60cc conventional saw with good power and balance that is still a little behind in the game as far as technical development goes, but it makes up for that with good build quality and exceptional feel.

The UK range of Echo saws has four machines from 45 to 60cc, but the bigger CS680 is an upgrade of the old CS6702 and is not in the same league as the smaller machines.

www.echo-tools.co.uk

Efco

The Efco range of Sharp-pro saws for professional use consists of just three machines in the UK. The Efco 162 has been around for quite some time now and it is without doubt one of my favourite 60-70cc saws outside the mainstream.

The 162 has an undeniable old school feel; it is what the conventional machines I used years ago would have developed into, had the new scavenging engines not arrived on the scene. This is not to put the 162 down in any way – it is simply a lovely saw to use, light smooth and very, very fast. It is also undeniably Italian, with a few quirks here and there, but it gets the job done at a reasonable price with an acceptable level of equipment.

The MT7200 is a different type of machine. It is pitched straight in with the big beasts from the main makers in the over 70cc class and although it is a much more advanced machine than the 162 it has none of the charm of the smaller saw. I tested the MT7200 and although it is a powerful and user-friendly machine with some modern features, it isn't a match for some in this class on anything but price, and whether the price difference is enough is open to question.

The biggest saw in the range is the MT8200. At just over 80cc it provides more than the 7200, but essentially is the same saw with a bit more go.

www.efco-uk.co.uk

Makita

The Makita range of petrol chainsaws extends to 21 machines. I will cover the ones I think are relevant to the professional market in the UK.

The DCS5000 is Makita's high performance lightweight 50cc machine for small thinning and utility work. It boasts a high revving yet smooth and powerful engine with a good level of equipment.

Makita have three bigger pro-

fessional saws that use a common base with three different capacities. Like the DCS5000 these are all powered by a conventional piston port engine that is durable and powerful with little complication. It remains to be seen how long manufacturers can continue with these engines though, in light of the new EU emissions regulations that are due to come into force in 2012. The DCS6401, 7301 and 7901 machines are by now very familiar and much admired for their build quality and reliability.

www.makita.com

(Click on Products – Outdoor power)

Husqvarna

It is still fair to say that many people look no further than Husqvarna when considering a new chainsaw. I was brought up with the orange machines and felled more trees than I care to remember using Husqvarna saws.

However, we live in a different world now and most of the timber harvesting in the UK is done by big machines powered by diesel engines that have replaced most of the cutters who used to do the work. The big chainsaw manufacturers all look towards the homeowner market and wider industries for their volume chainsaw sales.

The professional chainsaw which has a limited appeal is reserved for the few who demand the ultimate in performance.

Husqvarna's 576 AutoTune is right there at the forefront of new development. It has a self-tuning carburettor which makes the saw almost maintenance free.

The Husqvarna range contains a number of star performers that have been around for much longer than the new flagship 576. The little 346XP is a small thinning saw with outstanding performance, and is available with TrioBrake which allows the chain brake to be activated either automatically by the inertia release mechanism or mechanically by your left or right hand.

Then there is the 357XP, now a well established mainstay of many hand felling operations. These saws are modern, with all the features you would expect, including super fast cutting performance, but there is also room in the range for an old favourite. The 365 just refuses to go away and despite, or because of, its rather stolid performance, it remains one of the most popular saws in the Husqvarna range. It is also the star of the powerful, robust saw range that includes the 570 II, an X-Torq engined semi-pro saw that is loaded with features.



The 346XP from Husqvarna fitted with TrioBrake.

The bigger professional saws that are aimed at cutters working in really big softwood and hardwood are the 390XP and the 395XP with the 119cc 3120XP topping the range.

The Husqvarna range is comprehensive but in truth most fallers or forestry workers will only use a couple of saws. I use one of three most of the time and the three I have cover all the jobs I need a saw for.

www.husqvarna.co.uk

Stihl

Stihl are right there at the pointy end in the technology race. The MS 441 is about to become the MS 441 C-M, a saw with a microprocessor that tunes fuel delivery and ignition timing to provide optimum performance for all conditions. It also stores the settings and remembers them, but the major step that the 441 C-M takes is that it no longer needs a manual choke; so the already exceptional MS 441 should be even better.

The MS 441 was so good because of its four-port scavenging engine that is so powerful and torquey. I have wondered why Stihl didn't make a four-port version of the MS 361 which is another very, very good saw from the giant German company. The MS 362 is the new version of the MS 361 that has the four-port engine – more power, more torque and better fuel economy, but without the self tuning kit. This is the 60cc saw that makes me wish I wasn't so slow and decrepit, and that there was still a living to be made felling the way we did 20 years ago.

The Stihl range is as comprehensive as ever with the professional saws starting with the evergreen MS 260. It is due for replacement soon, the MS 261 having already been launched in Germany. Stihl say it will hopefully become available in Britain around the end of the year, so if you want another 260, get it

soon!

The MS 361 and MS 441 have already been discussed and a new saw, the MS 391, has been introduced as a new four-port engined mid 60cc saw with all the attributes of a farm saw but many of the refinements of a full pro machine.

The range is rounded off with the 650, the 660 that is used in the Timbersports series (and has been around for what seems like an age) and of course the all powerful MS 880 which at 121.6cc is the biggest saw on the market today.

www.stihl.com

Jonsered

I have left Jonsered until last because since Husqvarna and Jonsered split from their parent company a while ago there has been much speculation about the future of Jonsered. But, I can confirm that the full range of Jonsered saws is available through Central Spares. Husqvarna, though, is the senior brand in the UK and the company will focus on Husqvarna saws.

The Jonsered range remains pretty well unchanged from last year.

The smaller saws in the Jonsered professional range start with the CS2153 at 50cc and go up to the 65cc CS2156, which is the reliable saw for everyday use by contractors who want a saw with an easy temperament and good, if not class leading, performance. The CS2171 is a full-on felling saw with top performance from a conventional engine design. Top of the range is the CS2186 at 85cc, designed for felling bigger timber.

Jonsereds were known as reliable saws that employed proven technology while other manufacturers pushed the boundaries of performance and feature development. This would appear to be the future for Jonsered chainsaws – it may well be no bad thing.

www.jonsered.co.uk