

Chainsaw Review

Simon Bowes takes his annual look at the chainsaw market

It is a difficult year for all of us in the harvesting part of the forest industry and so I am making a bit of a break from the usual review this time around. I am going to talk about the saws I use and why I use the particular models I do.

For those of you who are perhaps new to my writing, I started life as a novice cutter in Yorkshire in the early 1980s just as PPE was being introduced. I began on a clearfell site, felling and converting Lodgepole pine for a local contractor who was one of the first to use a forwarder. Harvesters were a thing of the future and it was a while before we saw one in our local FC district. I used Husqvarna saws almost exclusively, as did everyone, and the 254 or the 266 were the only real saws to choose from. I quickly branched out and formed my own little work gang doing thinnings with a skidder on local estates and for the FC until the great storm of 1987 saw me leave the area for the riches on offer in Kent. The money earned in the windblow set me on the road to eventually having a fairly big skidding operation that varied in size with the strength of the market and the availability of work, until eventually certification and mechanisation sounded the end for the large hand felling gang; and so I had to bite the bullet and buy a harvester and a forwarder to remain competitive.

I still like hand felling though; I like sitting on a machine when it's cold and grey and rainy but I do like felling – perhaps I should see someone about that?

Unfortunately a knee operation I had two years ago that didn't quite go to plan, and a lifelong fondness

for beer and chips (that wasn't a problem when I was felling six days a week), sometimes make felling for more than half a day extremely painful, but it's a bit like banging your head against a wall – it hurts like hell but it's bliss when you stop. So out of the current crop what do I use and why?

Husqvarna 346 XP

The 346 XP is a little firecracker of a saw; it's light and fast and very compact. It has the annoying silver side cover but it's the mantelpiece and the fire syndrome that my dad used to apply, with great mirth, to girlfriends I brought home. We will let that slide but please, Husqvarna, go back to all orange. I did have a Stihl MS260 but the 346 is just worlds better in almost every respect. Everyone who picks it up can't help but be impressed and for underbrushing or as a saw to carry in a machine it is about perfect.

Stihl MS361

This is my workhorse saw. It has been used and abused for almost three years; it has had a ton-and-a-half Corsican pine dropped on it and has been used by all and sundry with no thought for its wellbeing. It has felled some huge trees for a 60cc saw but is still a gutsy little sod. Powerful, smooth and easily able to run a $\frac{3}{8}$ chain on a 15" bar, the 361 will do any job and it is good on fuel. I have replaced the ignition unit on this one at a cost of £55 and it is reluctant to tick over happily until it is properly warm, but it is a very old saw in the scheme of things. It should have been replaced two years ago but I'm no full-time cutter any more.



The heavyweight MS880 from Stihl, largest in their range at almost 122cc.

Stihl MS441

I bought the MS441 because I was so impressed with the one I had on test. Things started off badly with my saw – the flywheel came off after a week and the exhaust followed a few weeks later. It hadn't had all the screws fitted at the factory but my local dealer sorted all that out under warranty. Once the saw was put together properly it proved to be reliable and powerful like the test saw. I use it in bigger timber with a longer bar but usually I stick to the MS361 because it's a bit more nimble. The 441 comes into its own in hardwood where the extra torque from the new type of engine makes itself apparent and the 441 will run a 20" bar and chain with ease. It does seem to use less fuel than the older saws of the same capacity. I'm not convinced about the claims of huge fuel savings but I'm very sure of the power gains – they are certainly apparent.

Stihl MS650

This saw replaced my ageing 066 and is only now used occasionally. It had a good deal of use in the winter, felling ash on a clearfell we did, but in March it had its 25" bar and chain removed and was cleaned

down and put into storage. The truth is that for occasional trees the MS441 can do a fair job of turning a 25" bar, so, as good as the 650 is, it is being usurped by the smaller saws I have.

I'm sure a number of people will be surprised that there is only one Husqvarna in this list as it appears to some industry types that if you were to cut me I would bleed orange but that is not so. I use what I feel is best at the time and, though I look at saws like the Stihl MS361 and the Husqvarna 357 XP, and having owned both I know they are both excellent saws that I would use quite happily, I only chose the Stihl for two reasons.

At the time I felt the local Stihl dealer was far better to deal with than the Husqvarna dealer for me personally, although that has changed as the Husqvarna dealership has now moved. Secondly, the bar and chain option on Stihl equipment was and is superior to that on Husqvarna saws. This holds true for the Stihl MS441 and Husqvarna's new 576 XP. Having used the saws side by side, the Stihl has the edge because of the bar and chain but a real dyed in the wool Husqvarna user would probably disagree. One of



(Left) The MS361 from Stihl is powerful, smooth and good on fuel. (Right) Echo's CS600 comes equipped with a 15" bar and chain as standard.



(Left) Efco's MT7200, cleaner and more fuel efficient. (Centre) The 50cc DCS5000 from Makita, which fits neatly into the amenity saw category, and (right) the larger, 79cc DCS7901.

my subbies still insists his Husqvarna 372 XP is better than both of them, and he could be right, but they can't carry on making that archaic old two stroke "cos it's killing the planet" and so happily the argument will go on as to which is the best saw for you. And of course the marketing people at Makita, Efco, Jonsered and Echo might be wondering when they might get a mention in this review.

Well, it's time for that now so here we go with the 2009 chainsaw market review.

It is with Echo that we shall begin as they have two new saws on the market. The CS680 and the CS600 have been tested by my colleague Arwyn Morgan who found the 600 to be very much to his liking (FJ 8/09). This is a new addition to that all-important 60-ish cc class and is smooth, well balanced and powerful. Weight is about par at just under 6kg and the 59.8cc machine is equipped with a 15" bar and chain as standard.

The CS680, on the other hand, is a thinly veiled update of the old CS6702 that I criticised so heavily back in 2005. It will not make any significant impact on the chainsaw market though.

The other saw in the Echo range that will be of interest to pro users may be the 49.3cc CS510 which has now been around for a while. It boasts a six-point AV system and a dry weight of 5.1kg.

There is one more new saw in the Echo range, the CS8002. This is a dedicated felling saw of 80.7cc but it is not widely available in the UK.

www.echo-tools.co.uk
www.countax.com
 01844 278800

Efco chainsaws are built by the giant Emak company and are split into three categories. In the intensive-use listing, the 156 is the one that is of most interest to professional

users. A 56.5cc saw that can run both .325 and 3/8 bar options, it weighs around 5.5kg and makes a handy alternative to the usual suspects. In the Sharp-pro professional saw category is the 162 that I tested and found to be a very surprising performer in the 60cc class. It produces plenty of power at 4.7hp/3.5kW and was a much better saw to use than we expected, given its unfamiliar look and feel. It is fairly light too at just 5.5 kilos, definitely worth a second look, although it is starting to look as though it is ready for an update.

The MT range, 7200 and 8200, are the slightly bigger and newer machines that are the first of Efco's new generation saws that have more power than the older machines they replace (5.4hp/4kW and 6.6hp/4.4kW respectively) and are much cleaner and more fuel efficient. They also have a new steel spring AV system. The bigger MT 8200 can mount a bar right up to an impressive 30" in length.

In the Sharp-pro heavy-duty category is the 199, a dedicated felling saw with a 100.9cc engine that churns out 6.8hp/5kW and has the biggest bar and chain option in the Efco range with a 41" bar fitted with .404 chain listed.

The Sharp-pro saws all come with various features that highlight the saws' durability, like large air cleaners and pistons designed for long life. Although these saws are not at the forefront of new design features, they are aimed at users who want solid equipment that performs well at a good initial price. However this is not to say they don't match some of the better known brands in performance terms because they do.

www.efco-uk.co.uk
 Emak UK Ltd 01543 686660

Makita continue with the well established DCS range of professional saws that include the very good 6401 in the 60cc class. A physi-

cally large but not particularly heavy 64cc machine, the 6401 is notable for its build quality and robustness. It is a saw that is built on the same body as its larger 73 and 79cc stablemates that make up a three saw group in the Makita range. I have tested both the DCS6401 and the DCS7901 in the past and they both proved to be competent performers, with the smaller saw winning particular praise and being singled out as a saw that would do a range of different jobs, making it suitable for users who didn't need, or want, a whole range of saws. The bigger DCS7901 was similarly well built but came in for criticism because of its small air cleaner, a problem which has now been addressed.

Makita also produce a smaller saw that is becoming very popular. The DCS5000 is now the British Army's chainsaw of choice and at just 50cc, and with exceptionally light weight, it fits neatly into the increasingly more important amenity saw category, but for forestry users it is in the small felling category that it is useful.

The four-stroke chainsaw that Makita announced a couple of years ago is still being developed but as of yet we are still waiting to see a production model here in the UK.

Makita saws are of course developments of the Dolmar range that have been enhanced by the touch of Japanese technology, although in this case it was possibly better quality control allied with better production techniques that made the new Makita saws so good.

www.makita.com or
www.makita.com/uk then choose
 products and outdoor power.

Jonsered chainsaws continue to have a core of dedicated users who like the alternatives that the red and black saws offer. New this year is the first Jonsered with a low emission engine that is everything that the X-torq Husqvarna engine is but

without the name. This is in the 2255S model which bears a striking technical similarity to the 455 Rancher in the Husky range and is aimed at part-time professionals and serious casual users. The 2255S offers a tool-free chain tensioner option, obviously for the casual user. This saw will be a good saw for general use given that the orange version is a machine that performs well above its specification, and I do have a sneaking admiration for Jonsered saws that takes me back many years.

The rest of the Jonsered range has been rationalised a little since Husqvarna became a separate entity and left the restrictions of the giant EM group behind.

The Jonsered range of professional saws that will be of interest to the full-time user consists of eight saws including the new 2255S. The 2153 and 2152 are the smallest at 50.1 and 51.7cc respectively. I know this looks wrong, but the 53 is actually the smaller saw by capacity but it is the more powerful at 3.5hp compared to the bigger saw's 3.3hp. The smaller saw is also aimed more at the highly focused small felling/brushing saw user, with the bigger saw having a slightly more relaxed set-up. The 2156 and 2159 follow a similar trend, with the smaller 2156 in the range as the full power, fully focused top line saw for timber production, and the 2159 having a bit less all-out power and a bit less frenetic action to make life easier for users who don't need to work flat out all day. These two come in at 4hp/3kW for the 2159 and 4.4hp/3.2kW for the 2156, with both weighing about the 5.6kg mark. The 2165 is the hardy workhorse of the Jonsered range at around the 65cc mark; it produces a good spread of docile power with the promise of exceptional longevity. No startling performer, with just a touch more power than the 2156, it remains a good choice as a saw

for all jobs.

Towards the top end of the Jonsered range is the 2171, a full power 70.7cc felling saw that offers almost 5.4hp/4kW of power from just about 6kg of saw. It is an old model with a conventional engine that some people may find a bonus rather than a drawback, and it may be one of the 70cc saws they turn to once the low emission engines take over in this category.

The biggest saw in the Jonsered range is the 2186. At just under 85cc it provides the power to turn bars up to 28" in length, and, in common with all the saws in the Jonsered range, it is a reasonably light saw for its size at just 7 kilos.

Jonsered saws are now marketed under the same holding as the Husqvarna range saw and the contact details are almost the same although Jonsered still retains its identity as a separate name.

www.jonsered.co.uk
01453 820300

(Husqvarna Outdoor Products)

I don't know where to start with Husqvarna unless I say that I will present a much reduced list of models that I believe contains those saws that will form a useful pool from whence a professional user can pick one or two machines for day-to-day use. The range of saws that Husqvarna now offers is huge and it is wonderful if you are a homeowner who needs a saw that is easy to start and needs no tools to tighten the chain, but that doesn't apply here. I am going to look at the range of XP saws and a couple of the Powerful robust saws.

I have already talked about the 346 XP and how good it is, and the 357 XP is well established as one of the leading machines in the 60-ish cc class with its power, balance, reliability with the Husqvarna name backing all this up. The 372 XP has had a mention too; it should have been discontinued by now but it has a great following of dedicated

users who just won't stop buying it and so it keeps on hanging around in the catalogue. It will only be discontinued when the new X-torc engine 576 XP replaces it. The 576 XP has two versions in the catalogue, the standard one and the 576 XP AutoTune. The AutoTune version has a system that takes away the need for the operator to tune the carburettor for different working conditions. To quote Husqvarna's website, "It compensates for different fuels, altitude, humidity, temperature and clogged air filter." Oh joy! This is exactly what the 576 XP needed and it should enhance the saw significantly. The 576 XP has marked advantages because of its X-torc engine; it has a wide spread of power, it is slightly better on fuel and the detail changes to the saw itself, like the new rear handle, all add up to a better saw when in use. The one big thing that will force this type of saw into the marketplace is of course the legislation that means chainsaw engines must become cleaner and the X-torc engine is one of the engines that complies.

Husqvarna produce three big felling saws. The 390 XP is a felling saw that the ambitious can use for dressing out and rounding up, whereas the 395 XP is more of a dedicated hardwood saw. The 390 comes in at 87.9cc and 7.2kg, and the 395 is a big 93.6cc and 8.1kg. Bars go up to 28" on the smaller saw and 36" on the 395 which will also use .404 chain if required.

Husqvarna's biggest saw is the 3120 XP at 118.8cc and 8.4hp/6.2kW. The big hardwood felling saw has now been the top of Husqvarna's range for a number of years but it is not a saw that is used every day by many people, especially with its longest 42" bar and .404 chain option fitted.

Husqvarna's range of Powerful robust saws includes the evergreen 365 which is familiar to many users as the unburstable middleweight saw that can be relied on to pro-

vide long service with little fuss. It remains a best seller with many dealers despite its steady performance and lack of innovative features – or perhaps these are the reasons it is so popular. The Powerful robust range also contains the 570 which is equipped with a 67.9cc X-torc engine giving it a wide spread of power and good fuel economy. It also has some interesting new features in line with the newer generation of X-torc saws. It is possibly one of the most interesting new saws in the Husqvarna line-up.

In the Powerful robust saws there are also the 51.7cc 353 which is a starter level saw and the handy 59cc 359 that is popular with some people who find the 357 XP a little too high in speed.

All the XP range of Husqvarna saws come in a G version with heated handles. Features like tool-less cylinder covers, smart start and side chain tensioners are common across the ranges.

www.husqvarna.co.uk
01453 820300

The Stihl range of chainsaws is equally as comprehensive as that of Husqvarna, if not even more filled with machines that are not relevant to the pro user, so I have done some editing here too.

The smallest, and one of the longest lived of Stihl's professional chainsaws, is the MS260 with a lineage that can be traced back more than 20 years via the 026. It has had a revamp or two and still offers a robust, reliable option for users who want a small saw that is light and user friendly, a popular option for training colleges and utility companies.

It is fair to say that the MS341 and MS361 are just two different power versions of the same saw with the now extremely capable and consequently very popular MS361 topping the power chart at 4.6hp/3.4kW, as opposed to the 341's 4.2hp/3.1kW from their iden-

tical 59cc engines. The MS361 is probably one of the most significant saws in the Stihl range, along with the MS441. This introduced Stihl users to the low emission engine that produces more torque over a wider rev range with lower emissions and better fuel economy. The MS441 is one of the best saws in the 70cc class with excellent power, low vibrations and good user friendly features.

Hanging on in the catalogue above the 441 is the MS460. With its conventional engine of 76.5cc it is just 6 ccs bigger but is slightly more powerful at 6hp/4.4kW as opposed to the MS441's 5.6hp/4.1kW. It has, however, got a more familiar feel for those users who are finding it difficult to embrace the new technology of the scavenging engine.

Into the bigger saws of the Stihl range, the now familiar MS650 has become established in the role of the big multi-purpose saw for felling big softwood and some hardwood work, along with the evergreen MS660 that is a development of the long lived and very popular 066. The 650 displaces 84.9cc and the 660 91.6, with power outputs of 6.5/4.8 and 7hp/5.2kW respectively. Both these saws can turn long bars if needed but the MS650 can be fitted with bars as short as 18" without feeling cumbersome or drastically unbalanced.

Heavyweight, and the biggest saw in the review for another year, is the MS880, a fully focused hardwood felling saw of almost 122cc. The 8.7hp/6.4kW Stihl remains the top when it comes to bar length with its .404 equipped 48" option.

All Stihl professional saws come with side chain tensioning, tool-less air filter covers and Stihl's own bars and chains. Most of them also have tool-less fuel caps and a heated handle version.

www.stihl.co.uk
01276 20202



(Left) The 357 XP from Husqvarna still has a following of dedicated users. (Right) Stihl's MS441, one of the best saws in the 70cc class.