

# End of an Era

## A sterling workhorse – and old technology has its advantages

Husqvarna has quite a reputation in making chainsaws, and when the softwood chainsaw gangs were in full flow, Husqvarna reigned supreme.

The Husky, or other Scandinavian saws, were said to be softwood saws, whereas the German saws were said to be better hardwood saws. Whether this was fact or fiction I don't know, as softwood saws tended to be in the 50-70cc range, whilst the saws used for hardwood tended to be much larger. The softwood saws would often scream all day long, whilst the larger hardwood saws would chug along doing far fewer, but larger, cuts. Like most things in this day and age, nothing seems to be as clear cut as in former times. Having said this, I have always had a soft spot for Husky's mid-range saws, purely because they have proved to be workhorses, and for me, have done more than their fair share of hard work, and very reliably.

My first saw was a Husky 180 with an 18" guide bar. It had been bought by my grandfather and, after very little use but much neglect, given to my father. Often we would go to the woods, transport box on the back of the tractor, and cut firewood. Safety gear then was a woolly cap and some cotton wool for my ears, as it is ever so important to protect your hearing while you're young! I had always liked those chainsaw helmets with visor and earmuffs, but alas their price was way beyond my meagre cash supply.

However, our local ironmonger was retiring and everything was being auctioned off. It was at this

auction at the age of 14 that I bought my first (of many) chainsaw helmets. So there I was, having a few shots with the Husky 180, safety helmet on, and being trained. Oh! I forgot to mention that the 180 didn't have an anti-kickback brake, just a hand guard. It was a pain to start first thing, but once warmed up it would run all day. Guidance would be given in rather blunt Welsh with copious amounts of Anglo-Saxon (funny how Anglo-Saxon seems to bridge all national boundaries – perhaps the UN should use more of it).

Upon leaving school and starting work I soon realised that the 180 was overdue its retirement. It eventually developed a rather nasty habit of wrenching the starter handle out of your hand. I thus bought my first Husky 266. What a revelation – easy starting, lighter weight, yet powerful enough to drive an 18" bar. Of course, the old man thought I was being wasteful, buying a new saw when the old one cut perfectly well. That reasoning soon vanished when he realised how easy it was to start the 266, without the occasional snatch back of the starter handle which would leave you yelling in pain.

The 266 was a good saw. The softwood cutters tended to use shorter bars, but we stuck with the 18" bars as we generally cut hardwoods and would often use it to bore cut the hearts of trees prior to felling. Although we used Stihl 084s for large tree felling and crosscutting, the mid-range Huskies were the main workhorses.

After the 266 came the 268. It was at this time that there was



The Husqvarana 372 in its full working clothes.

a considerable reduction in the amount of cutters in the woods, and the 268 didn't seem to develop the same cult status as the 266.

On the basis that it is better to let all those annoying foibles be sorted out before buying one, I have always avoided new models of saws. It's bad enough having to buy a new saw without dealing with unnecessary difficulties. There seemed to have been various initial problems with the 268, but when we started to replace our 266s these problems had been sorted out.

The 268 proved to be a good saw, but on one occasion when the larger saw was out of action, we kitted out the Husky with a 24" bar. Although capable of driving it, it wasn't too clever.

Overall the 268 was an excellent saw for hardwood. I bought my last one in 1996 and soon afterwards moved abroad. I still have that saw but it is, as they say, very much the worst for wear having had a Botex trailer skim it and the tractor likewise kiss it some time back. It still runs well, and has been used as a back-up saw by a few who work for me. In fact, one of the boys that does a bit of part-time cutting for

me still uses a 268 hybrid – made from a new 268 which had been flattened by a forwarder and rebuilt using components from other worn out saws.

When I returned from overseas a few years back, Husqvarna had brought out the 271 which, if I'm not mistaken, is an upgraded 268. They then brought out the 371 which was somewhat different, and then the 372.

So, on coming home, my first saw purchases were Husky 372s. You will probably notice that I'm gradually going up the power scale. We have used and abused the 372s for several years. Once again they have proved to be a reliable workhorse. With 18" bars it has been noticed that they use more fuel than the 268s. It was with this in mind that one of the 372s was rigged with a 24" bar from new. Although very slightly undersized for the 24" bar, we have found that, when working on steep ground or under difficult circumstances, the slight lack of power has been more than compensated by its ease of use and manoeuvrability.

Although considered old fashioned by some, due to its older

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2-stroke technology, this technology is fairly bomb-proof. Some time back we were felling some oak in a swamp. Whilst retreating from an opening back cut, the 372 drowned! Expecting the worst I gently carried the cadaver to the shore, stripped off the air filter and spark plug, swished some fuel in the various orifices and set the saw upside down to drain. Some ten minutes later I refitted the spark plug and now dry air filter, and with a few pulls she started up fine.

Recently we were doing a general tidy up on one of our local estates. All the trees were either on the ground or had suffered major crown damage and were to be taken down. Many of the downed trees' limbs had already been cut up for firewood, so it was just a case of tidying up the stems, cutting off root plates, felling standing stems and cutting off any remaining split or shattered stems. One or two of the stems measured some 50ft hop-pus whilst most ranged from 120 to 220ft hoppus. Lengths weren't exceptional; it was just that these were old estate trees.

The estate has good internal roads, but nevertheless you had to negotiate some sharp bends and narrow bridges to access the site. The lorry with a big crane would

not be able to access the site. I would have to get the rigid body wagon which, unfortunately, has a smaller crane, so we would have to split some of the stems and cut many of them shorter than I would have liked. Skidding the stems out of the wood and then half a mile down the internal surfaced estate roads was not an option.

I was working on a large standing crownless stem of English oak, when some scumbag stole my Stihl 084 with its Cannon 42" bar. This really miffed me as the Husky 372 with its 24" bar was too small to cut off many of the root plates, and do much of the cross-cutting. Thus it was a quick visit to my local Husqvarna dealer, where I purchased a 28" bar.

The timber being cut was heavy timber such as beech, Turkey oak and English oak. The 372 did the job admirably, but realistically, if it was used with a 28" bar permanently, sooner or later it would suffer a severe coronary.

The only problem observed on this particular 372 – which has done considerable work with oversized bars – is that one of the anti-vibration mountings on the alloy crankcase has begun to show stress cracks, although these might have started when the saw slid and



The 372's practically bomb-proof sister, the Husqvarna 365.

tumbled down a steep mountainside, a mountainside where some of the trees did complete somersaults before finally reaching the bottom!

Two-stroke engine manufacturers have been having a bit of a rough time over the past few years, as new EU emission laws are forcing them to make ever greater developments to their engines. The resulting engines are often more fuel efficient, but also more complicated and often heavier than the older engines. So it could be said that the days of the Husqvarna 372 and its practically bomb-proof sister, the Husqvarna

365, are numbered, as its engine is of the old design and not compliant to the new EU regulations.

Whether the new engine designs will be as good, time will tell. One irony today is that, despite modern saws being available, the Stihl 070, an old 1970s design saw, is still popular in Asia and Africa, often in preference to modern saws with all their bells and whistles.

If, like me, you like your Husqvarna 372s, perhaps you better stock up with them, before they've gone for ever.

Arwyn Morgan

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