

# THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

## No time to stop

Dick Henderson is not the retiring type. He tried it once, on reaching his 65th birthday. The experiment lasted about two days. He then informed his son, Elliot, that he would be coming to work for him.

Elliot Henderson had a few lorries at that time. Dick installed a CB radio in one and was ready to go. 12 years later, aged 77, Dick is still driving the company's low loader,

secured a Valmet 860 on the low loader for a trip to Longtown. Six years old and with 14,000 hours on the clock, it had been traded in for a new 865.

But back to the beginning: Dick Henderson began his career working in the woods on nearby Philipough Estate, much of his time spent driving a skidder. There were no cranes in those days, and he well remembers the rigours of stacking timber by hand, and then loading the lorries that came to take it away on Saturday mornings, handballing three-metre lengths.

The first lorries he drove were BMCs carrying lime. They were a far cry from the vehicles of nowadays. "You had to put the brakes on in Selkirk if you wanted to stop in Galashiels," he recalls. He was 28 before he started carrying timber. Over the years, he has been in every wood in the Borders,

and, 'kens every back road'.

It was 33 years ago that Elliot Henderson started his business. To begin with it was more focused on tree planting and site drainage. Timber harvesting was simply something that occupied the remainder of the year, until it finally took off in a big way.

Dick's first experience of timber transport was when he worked for Mitchell of Ettrickbridge. He later worked for Jim Snowie, and finally James Baxter & Son for the 15 years up to the age of 65.

"If you sit in the house you just sleep," said Dick, remembering the void that was retirement. "I was fed up." Not that he gave himself terribly long to become accustomed to the experience.

No sleeping now, though; every day brings a new challenge. "You get out and meet the men you used to ken," he says. "Get a blether. No boss breathing down your neck – just do the job. You're not pushed." The low loader is sometimes double manned on long trips, but nine times out of ten Dick travels alone, and is able to get home and sleep in his own bed at night.

The low loader is used to carry machines for other contractors too, including Ronnie Macvicar. Dick is quite happy loading and unloading forwarders, but lets someone else load the harvesters. "I don't know all the buttons for the head," he explains, which means the delicate operation of positioning it correctly could prove a little unpredictable. He is quite happy unloading them, though, since this is simply a mat-

ter of lifting the head before moving off.

The low loader itself is well worth a look. The Scania R620 unit pulls a Doll 4-axle all-steer trailer. This makes a lot of difference to the driver. "You can put your foot down on corners," says Dick. "You just drive it like a car and it works out where to go." He admits he clipped a few things getting used to it.



Dick loads the Valmet 860.3 for its journey back to Longtown.



carrying harvesters and forwarders in and out of the forests, not only in the locality around Selkirk, but as far afield as the Highlands, and occasionally venturing down to Wales, or across to Ireland with the brash baler. With some 50 machines in the company's fleet, counting the diggers, he is a very busy man.

At the time of our visit, he had arrived at work at 6.30, and already delivered a harvester to Eskdalemuir. By the time we left, at the start of the afternoon, he had





Dick first started in timber working for Mitchell of Ettrickbridge. Here he is with a load of sawn timber from Lennoxlove Sawmill in the late sixties.



On the weighbridge at Hexham. A wagon and drag is easier to drive in and out of the wood. Dick got this one new, and drove it until his 'retirement'.

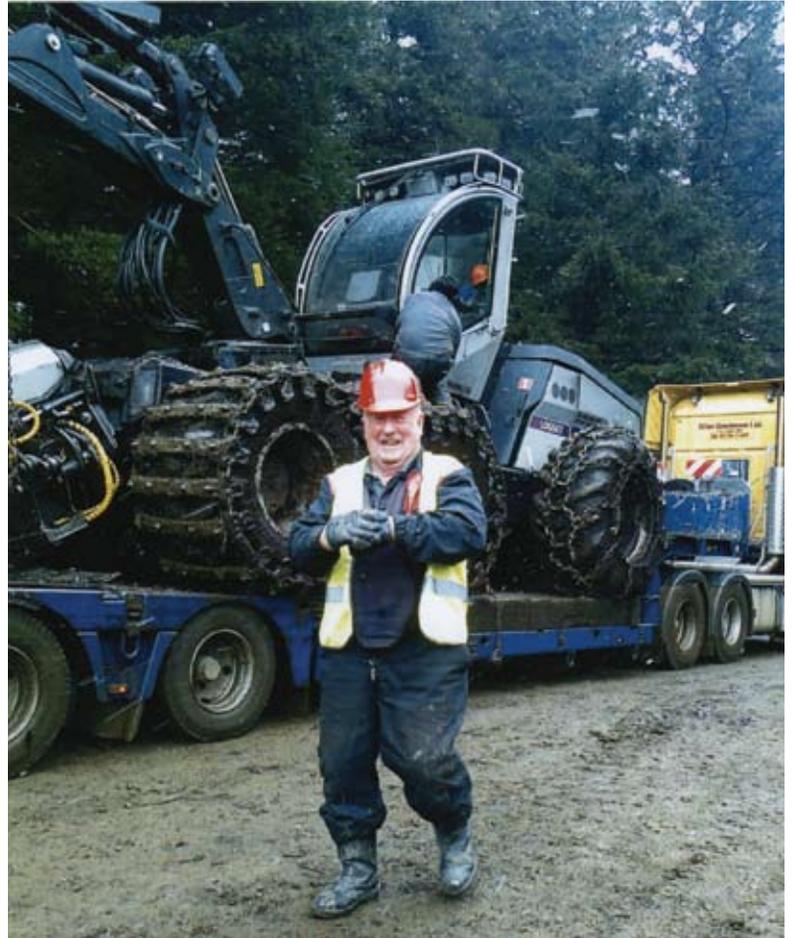
Height is obviously an issue when transporting harvesters and forwarders. The secret is to keep the trailer low and long.

Normally work proceeds from day to day in an orderly fashion, with minimal fuss. He was once stopped by the police in Lochgilphead, who wanted to measure the width of his load; a movement order is required to shift anything over 9' 6" wide. The paperwork was all in order, but they insisted on checking it before he proceeded on his way with his 10' 6" wide forwarder.

There was, however, something of a drama one day when a brand new Tigercat harvester slid down

the ramps of the low loader as it was being unloaded. This was caused by one side of the trailer sinking into a forest road that had not been properly compacted. When the trailer subsided, the harvester sat for a moment, then turned sideways and set off, ending up on its side on the ground. Willie Kennedy, who was at the controls, was unhurt, and, being a Tigercat, so was the machine. After getting it back on its feet, "We just wiped the mud off and carried on," said Elliot.

And how long will Dick go on working? Suffice it to say, he is not making any plans for his retirement just yet.



Dick and his low loader, delivering a Titan harvester for a customer.

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