



Foundation for growth

To diversify his business, Alberta contractor Randy Mattson recently expanded his operations in the forest industry, using a newly-purchased Hitachi ZX210F-3 Forester as the foundation for doing more logging.

Randy Mattson, president of First Pass Oilfield Contracting Ltd. in Grande Prairie, Alberta, has seen both the downs and the ups in the resource industries of forestry and energy.

“I moved from northwestern Ontario to Grande Prairie with my wife, three kids, and a U-Haul full of our stuff back in ‘91,” recalls Mattson.

“The oil patch was getting strong again, with a number of gas wells coming in, and there was a real need for distribution lines,” he explains. “I was ready to go after the business of clearing right-of-ways. And there’s enough forest around here that if a line went very far, it would go through substantial forestland, which is my specialty.”

First Pass uses a variety of roadbuilding and forestry equipment for making the “first pass” on the right of ways, bulldozing roads, felling/bunching trees, skidding, delimiting, and mulching.

“Last summer, it appeared oil and gas activity was slowing,” says Mattson. “I had the opportunity to bid on cutting for the Ainsworth OSB mill here in Grande Prairie. They were interested in obtaining new contracts for the cutting of their deciduous tree blocks.”

The contract Mattson won is to harvest a string of deciduous tree blocks that are within or adjacent to conifer blocks leased to another forest company, Canfor. First Pass builds the roads into the blocks, cuts the aspen, and hauls the timber to the road. After delimiting, the logs are cut to 16-foot lengths as required by the mill. The minimum diameter for harvesting is six inches at the butt, with a maximum diameter of 32 inches. Another company handles the loading and transport.

“I decided the best equipment package for this contract was a new, single unit that could delimit, cut to length, and stack the logs by the road,” explains Mattson.

“I decided to trade in my old delimitter and start fresh. A new machine would be more fuel efficient and have lower maintenance costs and better uptime. My older feller buncher and dozer would play supporting roles in the operation. I figured if the logging contract didn’t work out, I’d still have a more flexible machine for oilfield contracts.”

Mattson had never owned a Hitachi before. But after he paid a visit to Hitachi dealer Wajax, he was quite impressed.

“I learned the Forester machine was made in British Columbia. And I got really excited when I learned Isuzu had one of the highest fuel-efficiency engines. So I locked in a contract with the mill, partly based on my order with Wajax for a fall delivery of a brand new ZX210F-3 Forester. In the meantime, Wajax provided me with a used Forester until the new one could be built and delivered.”

And the Forester has been working out well, he reports. “The fuel economy is just as advertised. The light package works great. And the overall production I get out of the little four-cylinder Isuzu engine and the Waratah dangling head is excellent. I chose a processor head a little smaller than some might expect, but it has handled the larger wood just fine. The package is clearly more cost-effective than larger, more expensive machines.”



Mattson says the machine has been low maintenance. In terms of features, he particularly likes the optional reversing radiator fan, the larger fuel tank, and the durability.

Ainsworth is said to be quite pleased with what Mattson is doing and continues to give him more blocks.

“The oilfield service work is good, but it’s cyclical. Of course, the logging industry is cyclical, too. But, hopefully by working both industries, oilfield and logging, I’ll keep the crew busy.”

This story first appeared in the Hitachi magazine, “Breakout”.