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On-Site Timber Merchandising- One Man's Way To Compete

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Windsor, NC...Ed Coulbourn represents a new breed of logger-college-educated with a degree in business and a commitment to approach his business as a professional, trying to ward off the bad image that the logging profession has sometimes had.

Operating as Eastern Carolina Lumber Company, Coulbourn identified himself as an "on-site timber merchandiser." He's an independent, buying tracts of timber and merchandising them to the highest value. He takes merchandising seriously, going a step beyond most others. He keeps up with market trends (demand and prices) so that he knows how to go. Early on, he was a sawyer so he also knows how sawmills look at trees, and he takes this knowledge to evaluate trees for maximum value. He visits his regular mill customers to see what they need,

and he asks for feedback from his drivers (on a daily basis) about deductions.

The key to his merchandising success is the number of sorts that are made; he frequently does the sorting and loading himself. "My crew used to think that I was crazy, but I've made believers out of them." Crew foreman Dickie Hall, is being trained to take over the loader duties.

Coulbourn traded in a perfectly good Husky 235 last year for a Husky 335, just so that he'd get

the reach to do more sorts. He does up to nine (9) different separations for hardwood, from logs or veneer to box plant material to pulpwood. Pine sorts range from pilings to pulpwood and number seven (7).

He prefers staying in tracts with larger timber and is willing to pay a premium. He strongly believes in mechanization and has the felling hardware to prove it. The John Deere 544C wheel loader has a quick couple hitch. For felling large hardwood (up to 30 inches),



Stihl chain saw takes down a hardwood that's too large for his new CTR 4300 saw head. Only 5 percent of his trees have to be manually felled.



Ed Coulbourn, left, works hard to enhance the image of the logger and portray him as a professional.



With the quick couple hitch, hanging from one felling head to the other is only a 5-minute job for two men. "Having two heads with the quick hitch definitely pays off," observes Coulbourn.

he uses his new CTR 4300 felling head (utilizing a bar and chain design). When he saw how well the quick couple worked, he had Tidewater Equipment modify his Ronen 20-inch feller-buncher head for the same operation.

"I use each head about half the time, and it's definitely worth the money. It takes a single man 15 minutes to change heads and two men, just five minutes!"

Coulbourn runs two John Deere grapples, a 548D and a brand new 648D with 40-inch rubber. After two big snows in February and an extremely wet March and early April, the wide rubber was earning its keep. An older John Deere 540 cable machine, fondly called "Grandma" is kept as a spare and to pull trucks.

About five percent of the timber is felled with chain saws; Stihl's are the preferred brand, and they see duty for limbing and topping too.

Coulbourn studies deck setup for each tract prior to moving in to the site. The crew sits down with a model skidder and finds the best way to come in and out.. "That's how critical the deck is."

Coulbourn's crew, below, have come to be believers in multiple sorts on the log deck. Right, CTR 4300 felling head can handle up to 30-inch hardwood.



Haul distance averages just 25 miles so Coulbourn only runs two trucks (both Macks with Fontaine trailers). Up to nine loads can be stored on their deck. He runs new radials on the trucks and has his own tires recapped for the trailers. "Not someone else's, but my tires," he adds.

One of his best investments has been a GE cellular phone. It's not for the inbound capabilities but for calling out for parts and to call the mills to see who's accepting what.

Coulbourn believes that 1989 will be strong, partly because the momentum is strong enough to carry us through. He has high

praise for his wife Liz, whom he credits with sticking by him in good times and in bad. His children, Edwin and Betty Rawls are the apples of his eye. He's also quick to point out that without the Lord, he wouldn't be where he is.

He reports excellent support from both the Tidewater and Tulloss organizations.

"You know," he says, "this has to be a relationship of trust. I do 'pay as cut' in my timber buying, and I won't leave a person's tract until they're satisfied." Ed Coulbourn represents the best of a new breed of "on-site timber merchandisers."

