



The IronHorse, a nine-horsepower tracked machine, serves well for extracting wood, and causes very little ground disturbance.

A little light logging

Tracked machine is a high-power, low-impact alternative for woods work

by **Jane Fowler**

Like many farmers in the Maritimes, we have the invaluable resource of a small woodlot attached to our home-stead. A knowledgeable friend referred to our woods as old-growth Acadian forest, meaning it has never been cut commercially and therefore has a mix of hardwood and softwood trees of all ages, each with a role to play in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. This type of forest is becoming increasingly rare, so we had the dilemma of how to harvest wood in a sensitive manner, preserving the forest and the wildlife that live in it.

We had images of using horses, with their coats shining in the sun and their hot breath steaming in the crisp winter air. Horses ticked all the boxes regarding environmental impact, and seemed a perfect fit for our woodlot. However, they also come with needs of their own: stabling, feeding, good pasture – the list goes on. While we discarded our romantic notions of a workhorse, we didn't want large machinery that would rip the heart out of the forest.

After lots of searching we finally found a more suitable kind of horse – not the warm-blooded kind that answers to its name, but a horse made of steel. After all, my husband has a background in engineering; he more easily understands the language of pistons and carburetors than tack and harness, and he sees beauty in well-oiled cogs and an engine that purrs.

The IronHorse is a compact machine that runs on tracks, following behind as the operator guides it through the forest. It can handle all but the largest of logs, and can operate over most ground conditions with minimal impact. With a winch capable of pulling 2,000 pounds and an extendable, pivoting trailer, our nine-horsepower unit can carry a load of approximately 1,500 pounds. Roads are not necessary; if you can walk, it will follow.

The machine is manufactured by Lennartsfors in Scandinavia, and imported into Canada by Jonsered. We found a used one in Ontario. Actually, it was very well used, having been put to work

by a power company dragging poles into remote areas. It required some TLC and a spot of welding, but the cost of repairs proved to be relatively cheap, due to the fact that it has a simple drivetrain similar to that of a go-cart, and a centrifugal clutch like that of an ATV. Parts were easy to find and not as expensive as we first thought.

Since then, the IronHorse has been put through its paces, being tested in many difficult situations. Every time it delivers the goods, and does it without leaving a trace. When the snow is deep on the ground we can reach areas that are normally made inaccessible by watercourses. In the rainy season it is capable of crossing wet, boggy ground and climbing steep slopes. Eliminating much of the physical effort of harvesting logs, the machine allows us to make use of our woodlands. We can get deep into the forest without roads, and although extracting wood this way may be slower than other methods, it's a perfect solution for the private woodlot owner concerned with preserving a healthy forest. ●