

Sterling Opportunity

■ Third generation Adam Sterling steps up to the plate in southwest Mississippi.



Prentice red dominates Sterling's ironworks since he purchased three new Prentices in '07.



Owner Adam Sterling

By Jennifer McCary

LIBERTY, Miss.

February 1 is a red letter date for 29-year-old Adam Sterling. It was on this date two years ago that he realized his lifelong ambition to have his own logging job. "I've got logging in my blood," he says. "I got it from both sides—my mom's dad, my dad's dad and my dad were all in it." Three uncles—each married to sisters of his dad, Aubrey Sterling, also own logging businesses in southwest Mississippi.

"I can't think of anything else I would want to do as far as a career," asserts the third generation owner of Adam Sterling Logging LLC. "My dad did his share (35 years) and he was ready to retire so I figured, it's now or never." Sterling bought the



logging side of his dad's operation in 2006. Sister, Nicole, and husband, Brian Womack, bought the trucking side and contract hauls for Adam. Brian also runs a loader on the crew.

"I am real blessed to have this opportunity and then to be able to have my dad for guidance. He knows the business and I know I can depend on his wise advice," Sterling adds. Based on current timber market conditions, the young father of two (ages 2 and three months) says he would have been afraid to tackle such a daunting challenge without the benefit of buying his dad's existing business.

Aubrey still comes out to the job every once in a while and often lends a hand with dozer work. These days, he spends most of his time enjoying retirement: hunting, fishing and looking after his timberland and a few cows.

Sterling Logging runs an eight man crew and has contracted with Weyer-

haeuser and its predecessor Cavenham Forest Industries for close to 20 years. The company is one of a handful of contractors mainly working in privately-owned mature timber stands. About 90% of prescriptions call for a regeneration harvest with an occasional final stage thinning. Production averages from 100 to 125 loads per week.

The company delivers to Weyerhaeuser mills in Fernwood (sawlogs), and Holden, La. (chip-n-saw). Sawlogs also go to Weyerhaeuser's contract sawmill, Miles & Sons, Silver Creek, when the crew is working in the northern part of the district. Pulpwood logs go to Georgia-Pacific in Port Hudson, La. and Gloster.

Tools Of The Trade

Equipment lineup includes an '07 Prentice 2670 side-cut feller-buncher; two loaders: '07 Prentice 2384 and

'04 Tigercat 240B; and three skidders: '03 and '04 Caterpillar 525Bs and a '07 dual arch Prentice 2432. Both loaders have CTR slashers with a CSI pull-through delimeter mated to the Tigercat and a CTR on the Prentice. An '07 John Deere 650J dozer supplied by Stribling Equipment, Jackson, is used for road work. An older model Prentice 210B serves as a backup and is used to finish out par-

tial loads at landings so the regular loaders can move on to the next set.

D-M Equipment Co., McComb, supplied the new Prentice iron. The Sterlings have been running Hydro-Ax (now Prentice) cutters since they first mechanized the felling function. "We've always had good service out of them and this cutter has done a good job," the owner says. "Often we're in bigger timber and I guess this is the only one on the market with that 'dap' door that you can raise so you can cut a larger tree. That really helps us a lot. It makes cutting a lot faster and smoother."

The 2432 is Sterling's first Prentice skidder and he's been pleased with its performance. Having run Caterpillar skidders for many years, the logger was willing to give Prentice a try because he felt confident that D-M Equipment would stand behind it. The dealer's owner, Pat Doyle, and son Sean, have a long standing, multi-generation relationship with the Sterling family, dating back to Adam's grandfather, John Edward Sterling.

Adam especially likes the skidder's dual arch—also his first—which can reach higher than the booms on his other skidders. A big advantage of a dual arch is that it gives the operator more power, especially on wet ground or hilly terrain because he can lift the load to minimize the amount of drag. Sterling notes that higher reach comes in handy for quick cleanup behind the delimiters.

Remaining equipment dealers include Puckett Machinery, Natchez (Caterpillar), and B&G Equipment, Magnolia (Tigercat).

The operation normally runs two loaders at independent landings on the jobsite with one skidder pulling to each. Logs are pushed through a delimiting gate, which makes it easier for the loader operator to sort logs and keeps the landing area cleaner and safer. A third skidder pre-bunches logs a safe distance from the landing and also pulls trucks out of the woods as needed. A sawhand works in the staging area to top hardwoods or cut the bigger logs that may be too big for the delimitter. Sterling pays attention to minimizing skid distances to try to conserve off-road



Prentice side-cut sawhead makes cutting big timber easier and faster.

fuel consumption. Each skidder normally consumes a tank of fuel daily, about 80 gallons.

Trucking

Sterling has kept his two haul tractors, a '97 Western Star and '05 Peterbilt, both purchased while he was still an employee. He also owns two Kent bolster trailers, a Kent lowboy and Magnolia lowboy.

Normally there are six trucks hauling from the job. Contract haulers include Brian Womack Inc. with three trucks and Freddie Windham Trucking with one. The logger relies on Harvest Haul, based in Magnolia, to pick up the slack when additional hauling capacity is needed. Harvest

Haul contracts with Weyerhaeuser to provide no-cost trucking services for participating Weyerhaeuser contractors in the Mississippi-Louisiana region. "That works out pretty good," Sterling says. "There are pluses and minuses with anything, but I like having that option."

Company and contract trucks have on-board Vulcan scales supplied and serviced by Nation's Welding of Brookhaven. The Sterlings added scales 10 years ago to ensure maximum payloads on each haul. With a decade of experience behind them, Sterling says the scales hold up and usually will last the life of the truck. Accuracy isn't a problem as long as the wire running from the truck to the trailer is closely monitored and

maintained. The only other maintenance cost is the occasional replacement of a load cell.

Concerns And Supplies

Sterling would like to continue his dad's tradition of trading equipment at 5,000-6,000 hours or roughly every four years. "Right now there's not really a market for used equipment and they don't give you as much on trade ins," he observes. "So you're really forced to run your equipment longer than you might want."

Keeping equipment serviced and well maintained is a top priority, the logger emphasizes. "The way things are now you can't afford major breakdowns on top of everything else," he



Sterling runs two Caterpillars and one Prentice, which is his first dual arch skidder.



adds. Operators are responsible for daily greasing and inspection of their mounts and truck drivers perform daily inspections. This allows them to fix anything that looks like it could cause a problem before it actually does. Crew members Melvin Morgan and Thomas White lend a hand with oil and filter changes on the weekends. Scheduled changes are done at 150 hour intervals.

Minor repairs are handled in the woods and bigger jobs go to the respective equipment dealer. A Freightliner service truck carries needed supplies, tools, welder, air compressor and a hose machine. Old River Supply, Crosby, and Dutch Lubricants, McComb, provide the company's lubricants. Preferred brand is Chevron Delo 1540 motor oil.

He buys Firestone equipment tires from Old River Supply. Truck tires are purchased from Old River Supply and Gene's Tire Center, McComb. Sterling runs Bridgestone and Firestone tires on the steering axle and recaps on the trailers.

Most of the company's employees have been on board at least 10 years, which is almost as long as the owner has been working full time in the woods. Skidder drivers Joe Williams and Melvin Morgan have 18 years tenure with the Sterlings and can remember when the owner was still a boy visiting his dad's work site.

Completing the crew are skidder driver Percy Tillis; loader operators Womack and Scott Johnson, the newest member of the team; cutter operator Thomas White and sawhand Jerry Wells, who joined the company a little over a year ago. Company



Front from left: Thomas White, Brian Womack, Melvin Morgan, Joe Williams, Percy Tillie, Freddie Windham; back row, Jerry Wells, Adam Sterling, Scott Johnson, Aubrey Sterling and Roy Torrence

truck drivers include Roy Clark and Robert Hitchens.

People Person

D-M Equipment's sales manager Sean Doyle says he believes employee retention will not be a problem for the new owner because Sterling has a great way of dealing with people. "He's a very good people manager from what I've seen. Loggers have to deal with a lot of stuff between the landowners, county commissioners, law enforcement, and personnel. But Adam handles whatever adversity comes his way as cool and level head-

ed as anybody I've seen," he states.

The young logger credits much of that to the understanding and support he gets at home. Wife Kelli handles the day to day bookkeeping and payroll, in addition to the demands of a toddler and newborn. "She helps me a lot because she knows I have a full day and a lot of times that goes from before dawn until after dark. It's nice to have her and the kids to come home to and get some of that stress off after you leave the woods."

The Sterlings have a heart for children and are active in their church's youth program. Although they haven't gotten involved with

Log A Load for Kids, the Sterlings contribute to St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

Because he works in Louisiana and Mississippi, Adam is a member of both the Louisiana Logging Council and Mississippi Loggers Assn. He and his dad completed their Master Logger training in Louisiana and his brother-in-law has also taken some of the courses. He says membership is important because it helps him keep up-to-date with important issues in the industry and the local area. He notes, "It's hard to get the scoop on everything when you're out in the bushes." **SLT**

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