

A boom of her own

The cab of a Prentice 325 loader is an unusual place to find a woman, but for Amber Yokum, it's right where she wants to be.

Amber Yokum handles heavy logs many times her weight and doesn't think twice about it. Not that it's easy. She's clear on that point, especially to guys who don't believe it's a tough job because a girl is doing it.

"Sometimes they give me a hard time when I tell them it's not easy," she laughs. "That's irritating but I just let it go. They're probably too bullheaded to listen anyway." Still, she wouldn't mind getting one of them out to the job site to prove it.

Unlike the others, her boyfriend is really impressed by what she does. As he should be.

21-year-old Amber, from Chaneyville, PA is one of the few women in the country who have chosen logging as their career. She has a steady job working in the woods with her father and older brother. She runs the loader, a Prentice 325, on logging operations for their company, Yokum and Sons Logging and Trucking. Yes, sons.

"That's the name of the company because it used to be just my dad and two brothers," she explains. "My other brother moved away and doesn't work with us anymore. But we're keeping the name like that for now."

Yokum and Sons cuts cordwood, pine logs and pulpwood for a variety of customers in the region. The company owns two International skidders, one Dresser dozer, an older Tree-King loader along with the Prentice, and two trucks, a Peterbilt and a

Kenworth, with two log trailers.

Amber considers herself lucky that her father, Sam Yokum, asked her to start working with them when she was 18.

"I was never interested in working at the mall or someplace like that," Amber says. "When I was younger I liked driving the farm tractors. I really enjoy working the loader and being outside." The Yokums also run a family farming operation along with the logging company.

Amber learned to operate the loader on the job but it helped that she was used to running other equipment.

"My dad and brother showed me how to work the levers and the joysticks. They taught me all the different maneuvers. It took a week or two to get used to it at first and the rest I learned from experience," she says.

She also handles some of the maintenance, greasing the machine and checking it regularly. "I'm not afraid of getting greasy. I never minded getting dirty. My mom has a picture of me as a kid playing in the mud."

Considering that most heavy machinery isn't built for women, we asked if she'd change anything

about the cab of the Prentice.

"I think it's built just right," she says. "I can move the seat up and down so that it's comfortable and I can reach all the controls." She also likes that it has air conditioning and heating.

Amber's first Prentice was a 210D, which she operated for two years. The 325 is a recent upgrade. She'd like to try one of the brand new Prentice loaders but, for now, the 325 is working well for the company.

Her chance may come next year, when she plans to get in on the loading contest run by Prentice at logging shows.

"I missed it this year at the Richmond Show because we got there too late," she says, "but I'd like to give it a try next time." She already has a strategy lined up. "I think you have to go for accuracy and not speed. If you try to go too fast, you won't do a good job."

A new loader is really the only thing she'd change about her job. "I'd like to move up to a newer machine so I can listen to music," she laughs. "The radio is broken in mine."

Amber has one other challenge to tackle. She wants to build more muscle so she can also help her father and brother on the skidder. "Lifting the chains to attach logs is tough," she admits. But it's not going to stop her.

She sees herself continuing to work in the woods for a long time to come. "I might have kids some day and I'd take care of them, of course, but I'd want to get back here in the woods as soon as I could," she says. "I'd really miss it." **LM**



Amber Yokum tries a new Prentice 2384 knuckleboom loader on for size at Expo Richmond 2008.