

# On The P-r-o-w-l

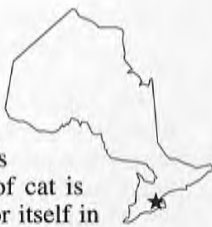
Tigercat leaps into the fray with strong machines; more new products forthcoming.

By DK Knight

BRANTFORD, Ont.

**F**rom an obscure beginning in late 1991 in the basement of a large steel fabricator's headquarters building, a new breed of cat is clawing quite a name for itself in the North American logging equipment community.

Less than five years ago Tigercat Industries Inc. unveiled its first machine prototype, a drive-to-tree feller-buncher tagged the 726, at Timber Harvesting Expo-Southeast near Quitman, Ga. The



odds were stacked against the company's chances of success. It had no history, no distribution system and no experience with drive-to-tree feller-bunchers. Furthermore, it was scratching to enter a price-sensitive market segment as the industry crawled out of a downturn.

According to Tony Iarocci, Tigercat President, the fledgling company overcame the odds by researching the market carefully, focusing on a single product, pulling together an engineering-driven group with strong forestry equipment credentials and designing a higher quality machine. Says the soft-spoken Iarocci:

"We felt confident that our engineering and manufacturing capabilities would lead us to success."

Encouraged by the industry's reception of the distinctive 726 and with sales surpassing all expectations, Tigercat attracted the attention of both potential customers and dealers, not to mention the competition. It expanded to design and manufacture additional models and to introduce new products.

Despite the fact that its products typically cost more, the company briskly emerged as a major player in a crowded, relatively mature market. In fact, in the short history of North American logging equip-

ment evolution, perhaps no other manufacturer has grown so fast or introduced so many products so early in its life.

Tigercat's initial offering, which Iarocci says incorporated several precedent-setting design elements and a four-year center section warranty, was followed a year later by a slightly smaller machine, the 720, which remains the company's best seller. Then came two track machines, the 845 and 860. Through 1996, Tigercat had manufactured and sold more than 600 feller-bunchers, most of them four-wheel types now deployed in Southern U.S. forests. That first 726, according to Tigercat, continues to fell and bunch for Williston Timber, Ocala, Fla.

Reflects Iarocci: "Time will tell, but we may have built a feller-buncher that has two to three years more life than the industry has been accustomed to. We have no indication as yet that it will not turn out that way."

While upper management believed Tigercat had developed a technically superior machine design, it was soon evident that an effective distribution system was no less essential. At first it was a painful process, but as the 726 and 720 gained popularity and as the company added to its credibility, dealer development became easier. Eventually, dealers began asking for the Tigercat line. Tigercat's dealer network now ranges from small companies with single outlets to large entities with 10 or more locations. As well, a mutually exclusive marketing agreement permits the company to distribute its track feller-bunchers in Canada through John Deere industrial dealers.

Tigercat's assembly operations presently encompass 100,000 sq. ft. combined in three facilities here and in nearby Paris, Ont. The company employs 120, 20 of which are engineers. Tigercat's assembly operations are supported



It all started with this machine in the spring of 1992.



Paul Brooks, left, and Dave Goad assemble another Tigercat 720.



by companion companies MacDonald Steel Ltd., Manufacturer's Metalfab and Dytech Resources, all located within a hour's drive. These well-equipped facilities encompass about 400,000 sq. ft. In its 37-year history, MacDonald Steel has performed custom fabrications for Caterpillar, Hyster, Euclid, Clark, Koehring Waterous, Timberjack, American Hoist, Champion SuperPac and Bomag, among others.

Iarocci is quick to praise the individual and collective abilities and performance of Tigercat's personnel and lauds the positive attitude that abounds. "The team we've had the good fortune of putting together is dedicated, works hard and knows this business," he says. "We have no hierarchy in this organization and we like for our people to work as entrepreneurs as much as they can."

This freedom, he points out, generates a high level of energy and enthusiasm and results in rapid progress when it comes to designing new and improved machines and attachments.

Although Tigercat employs a proportionately high percentage of engineers for a manufacturer, its engineers do more than manipulate images on a computer screen and monitor fabrication and assembly. The Tigercat president explains: "Our engineers are more involved with the marketplace than is the traditional case. Most are free to hit the road at any time to communicate with our distribu-



**Left photo: Engineering huddle, l-r, Tony Iarocci, Robin Barker, Kevin Keats, Jon Cooper**  
**Right photo: Engineer Grant Somerville, right, confers with Paul Brown, assembly supervisor.**



tors and customers. Nothing beats getting information directly from the end user."

Tigercat's engineering strength is a blend of experience, youth and enthusiasm. For example, the most experienced member of the team is John Kurelek, whose list of credentials includes developing the industry's first high speed sawhead while with Koehring Waterous, the same company Iarocci was affiliated with for many years. Interestingly, of the 20 engineers on staff, 12 are less than 30 years of age. Jon Cooper, point man for Tigercat's recent skidder development project, is 31.

All the engineering expertise and fabrication finesse are manifested on the clean, orderly assembly floor. Rather than an assembly line, each machine is put together in a given area by highly skilled teams of two. According to Iarocci, this fosters pride and teamwork

and helps management trace and deal with any assembly problems that may occur.

In addition to four models and two types of feller-bunchers, the Tigercat offering today includes two bunching shears, a high-speed bunching saw, a shovel logger and skidder. Introduced as a prototype last May, the first production models of the 630 skidder were delivered to end users last fall. The 215 HP machine features hydrostatic drive, making it a rarity among skidders. Iarocci claims the 630 is the industry's first serial production hydrostatically driven skidder. As such, he says, the 630 promises superior operator comfort, higher productivity and longer life for engine, drive line components and tires.

"Like all Tigercat products, we're expecting big things from the 630 skidder," says Iarocci. "Our two prototypes were put to the limits during the summer months by a logger in Virginia and another in Mississippi. They were quite pleased with the machine's near trouble-free performance—so much that they bought the prototypes. We feel that the Tigercat skidder will be as highly acclaimed as our other products."

New product development—a minimum of one per year—is consistent with Tigercat's strategy to offer a complete forestry product line. According to Iarocci, other offerings from the manufacturer over the next couple of years may include a knuckleboom loader, processor head and clambunk skidder.

"We're very happy with our progress and this in itself encourages our team performance," Iarocci says. "Along with our distributors, we are poised to take more aggressive steps to position ourselves as the benchmark of the industry."

It appears that Tigercat's surging success story will consist of many new chapters in the years ahead. ■



**Newest Tigercat is the 630 hydrostatic skidder.**