



Métavic Wheeler

This log trailer can haul a day's production of logs behind your large pickup.

By **Bil I Gove**

Even though you may not be able to justify the cost of owning a log truck, I'm assuming you'd prefer to haul your own logs to market – if you could just find another option. There are few things more inconvenient, after all, than having to accumulate an entire truckload of logs at your operation before a trucker will show up (and even then, you don't know exactly when he will finally arrive).

What if you could find a trailer, however, that's large enough to haul

Don Stebenne, above, works with his Métavic Wheeler trailer and loader, which are hitched to his Ford F350 XL Super Duty pickup truck.

a day's production of logs – yet small enough to haul behind a large pickup? And while we're at it, let's also stipulate that this "ideal" piece of equipment would be heavy enough to carry logging equipment, but not large enough to require a commercial driving license (CDL).

Too good to be true? Not at all. Practical trailers meeting these ideal requirements are on the market; sometimes, it just takes a while to track them down. This month, I've done some of that leg work for you: I made two trips to take a look at a trailer dubbed the Wheeler, manufactured by Métavic.

Hauling to market

Don Stebenne of Hartland, Vermont conducts a one-man logging show in

central Vermont. He logs about 300,000 BF of sawlogs yearly, plus another 150 cords of firewood and about 250 tons of fuel chips cut from tops and junk wood with a Morbark chipper. Stebenne hauls his logs to market himself with his pickup and Wheeler log trailer.

Stebenne's usual procedure is to log out enough logs during the day to make a trailer load; he then spends the remainder of the day making the delivery. A little log decking at the landing is necessary, of course, in order to accumulate enough of each log species to comprise a trailer load.

On the day I arrived, Stebenne was loading some fine hard maple logs ticketed for transport down to a sawmill in southern Vermont. With about 18-1/2 feet of length on the

Métavic Log Trailer - The Wheeler

load portion of the trailer body (it measures 25-1/2 feet overall), Stebenne was doubling up the shorter logs on the load bottom to make a neat, compact load.

The loader on Stebenne's Wheeler is the Métavic 1400, the standard loader that comes with the trailer. The 1400 has a 14-foot reach, which Stebenne has come to realize is not enough for comfortable use. One of the problems he's encountered with this limit of 14 feet of boom reach is the difficulty in placing short logs on the rear of the trailer deck when building the first course of logs. As he demonstrated, the end of a short log hits the exposed cross members of the trailer frame, which prevents the log from moving back – and the loader cannot reach back far enough to lift it over the obstruction. Stebenne has found a way around this problem by securing a 1/8-inch skid plate on top of the rear portion of the trailer frame, allowing the logs to slide back.

Métavic will provide a larger loader if desired, even one with a telescopic extension that extends another 3 feet. The manufacturer also makes the metal plate decking an option as well, indicating that Stebenne is not alone in his problem with the shorter boom reach. Note: The height of the loader when traveling is 9-1/2 feet, allowing Stebenne the needed clearance to go under 10-foot bridges in his area.

That day, Stebenne loaded just over 1,000 BF of hard maple logs, although the Wheeler is capable of carrying a larger load. To stay legal and not be required to have a special permit on his secondary town roads (which are posted at 24,000 pounds), Stebenne tries to maximize his loads at about 1,050 BF for hardwood and 1,550 BF for pine.

Total length	25 ft., 6 in.
Load bed length	18 ft., 8 in.
Width	8 ft., 4 in.
Height of loader	9 ft., 6 in.
Frame	Lightweight steel, sealed tubing
Suspension	Torflex
Brakes	Dexter, electric (all eight wheels)
Tires	LT 235/85 R16, 10-ply (all eight wheels)
Weight	6,200 lbs. (trailer and loader)
Max. gross vehicle weight	20,000 lbs.
Price:	\$28,975

Métavic 1400 Loader

Lift capacity	2,000 lbs., at full reach
Loading length	12 ft.
Loading capacity	13,500 lbs.
Hydraulics	HVI 22, 8 gal.
Power	Honda 13hp w/electric start
Compatibility	45hp and over
Boom length	14 ft.
Boom rotation	270 degrees
Grapple rotation	Continuous
Grapple opening	40 or 52 in.
Electric system	12v battery, charged by power unit
Lights	2 DOT working headlights

Manufacturer's comments: With its own power unit, you can use the Wheeler anywhere. Choose from three types of attachments: fifth wheel, goose-neck or tag-along. Assemble it to your truck; it's balanced, so it can carry its load.

U.S. Distributor: Les Distributions Payeur Inc., 5379 Rue King Est, Ascot Corner, Quebec, Canada JOB 1A0. Info: 819/821-2015, www.payeur.com.

The Wheeler can work in conjunction with any of three basic types of hitches: fifth wheel, goose-neck or tag-along (straight neck). Stebenne's Wheeler has the goose-neck version, with a ball hitch mounted in the body of his 1-ton pickup, a Ford 350 XL Super Duty. He prefers the goose neck due to the ease of unhooking and the break-

away safety switch. Note: Métavic tells me that a 1-ton pickup is sufficient for a goose neck or a fifth-wheel type of hitch; however, the tag-along style, using a pintle hitch on the truck, works best with a 1-1/2- or even a 2-ton truck.

Two other points to note:

- Stebenne has found that he has to be extra cautious with the trailer in deep snow conditions. With most of the load weight on the trailer's tandem axles, he's encountered problems with insufficient weight on the drive wheels of the truck.

- Other than two broken hoses during the two years that he's used the Wheeler, Stebenne reports that he has had no problems with it. He considers his total investment of \$62,000 for the trailer, loader and truck to be a reasonable one for such a versatile and use-



Richard Brown has added a hydraulically operated winch to his Wheeler trailer and Métavic loader combo.

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

ful combination of equipment.

Adding good options

Over in the white pine country of western Maine, I located another owner of a Wheeler trailer. In the small town of Standish, retired auto mechanic Richard Brown stays busy on his 90-acre woodlot, which is attached to a farm (he also owns additional nearby woodlands). He has a small sawmill permanently set up on his back property.



Both Stebenne and Brown have encountered difficulties with the 14 feet of boom reach of the Métavic 1400 loader; both would recommend buying a longer-reach boom.

Brown has had a Wheeler for the three years he's been retired, and although the trailer has not been used extensively, he finds that in addition to aiding his own logging activity, the trailer has come in handy for picking up logs his neighbors want processed and in delivering lumber. One neighbor, for instance, had four or five logs that had to be taken away following a dispute over a driveway location. Brown typically loads a maximum of 1,500 to 2,000 BF of pine logs.

Brown, like Stebenne, has the standard Métavic 1400 loader on his Wheeler. He, too, has encountered the problem of insufficient reach, and recommends buying an extendable boom to solve the problem. I should note that both men said that if they purchased another loader, it would be certainly be one with a longer reach.

When it comes to the loader's hydraulics, the motor for the hydraulic system is a 13-horsepower Honda,

but motors as large as 20 horsepower are available for larger-sized loaders. The 8-gallon reservoir for the HVI 22 hydraulic fluid is tucked away in a safe position.

Near the base of the loader, Brown has added an optional item that he is quite pleased with and highly recommends: a hydraulically operated winch. With the winch located on the trailer frame behind the headboard, the winch cable extends over the top of the headboard for use in retrieving logs that are beyond the reach of the loader. It's a very practical feature.

Another optional feature he's chosen to have: the integrated machinery-loading ramps, which mount permanently onto the rear of the trailer. Nothing could be handier when moving his tractor or small bulldozer.

Brown's Wheeler has the tag-along style hitch, using a pintle version on the rear of his Ford F250 truck. The brakes on the Wheeler are electric and will lock automatically if connection with the truck is broken.

I asked Brown how he likes the Torflex type of suspension that's found on the Wheeler – he praised it, telling me that the trailer hauls easily with very little sway. The Torflex suspension, which has been around for quite a while, suspends the ends of the axles independently on rubber mounts, and does away with metal springs. As a result, the system does indeed cut down on any bounce and swaying, and does not transfer road shock from one wheel to the other.

Now that Brown has had his trailer for a while, what changes would he recommend? His only major concern, he says, has been with the need for longer boom reach. And while he did manage to knock loose an exposed hose, it was something he could quickly take care of himself.



Stebenne prefers the goose-neck style of hitch due to its ease of unhooking and breakaway safety switch.

A Junior option

The use of lightweight, roadworthy trailers for the transport of logs and logging equipment has become common among volume logging operators in many areas. Now, it's becoming nearly just as common among tree-care professionals. And smaller woodlot owners and sawyers can also make good use of such a trailer. To even better accommodate the latter group, Métavic also makes a smaller version of the Wheeler, called the Wheeler Junior – which has a load capacity of 7 tons gross vehicle weight. ■

Bill Gove is a contributing editor to Sawmill & Woodlot magazine.

AS SEEN IN
the May/June 2003 issue of

Independent
**Sawmill
& Woodlot**
MANAGEMENT

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