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September/October 2007 - \$4.00

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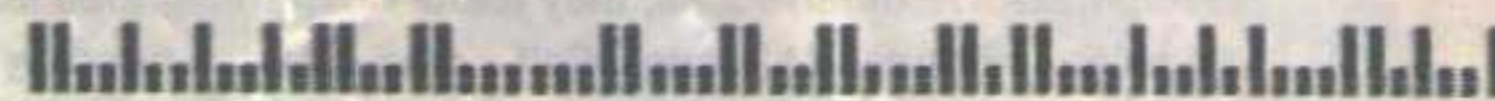
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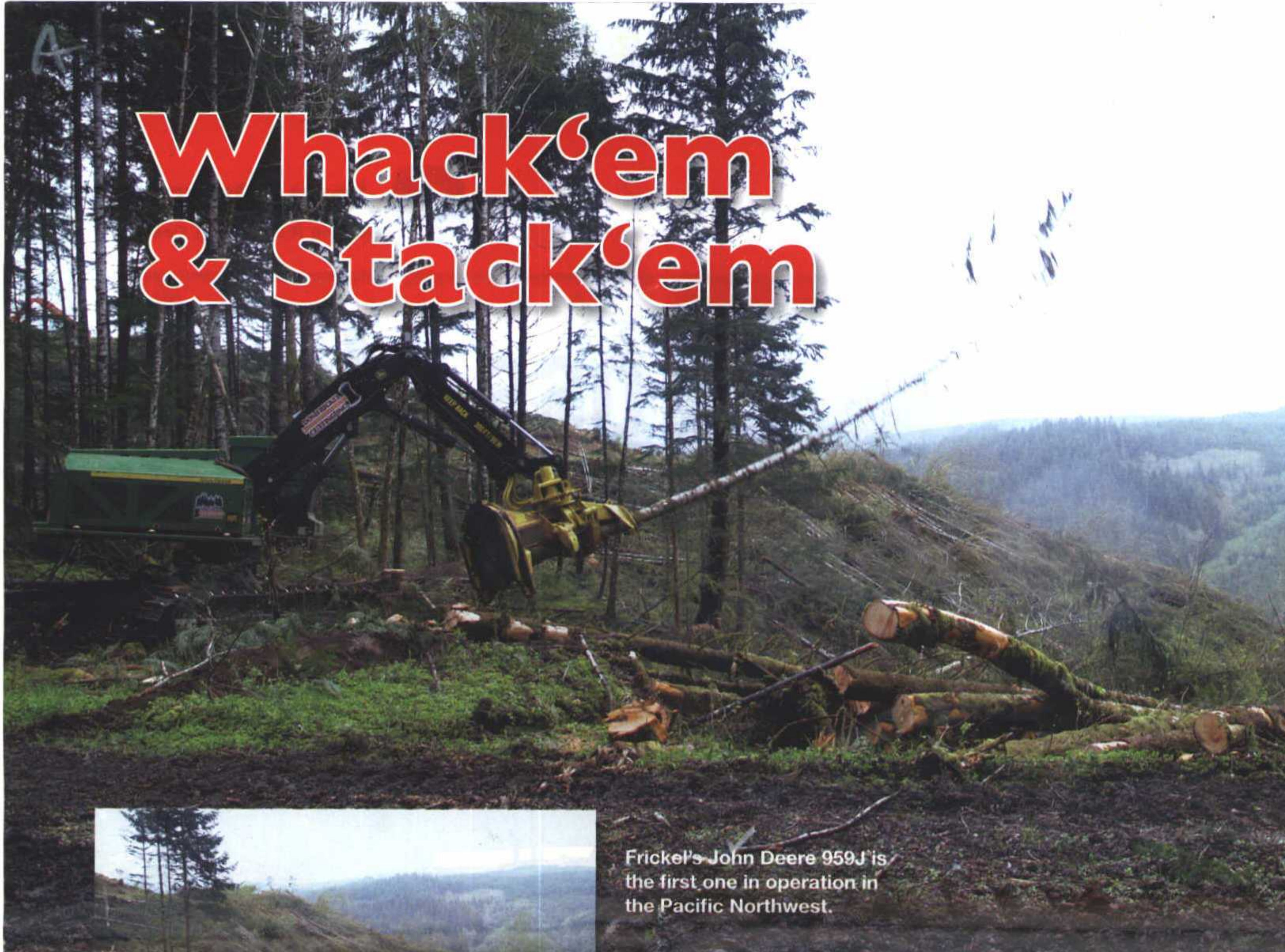
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Whack'em & Stack'em



Frickel's John Deere 959J is the first one in operation in the Pacific Northwest.



Don Frickel Contract Cutting stays on top of their game by focusing on safety and quality — and a new John Deere doesn't hurt either

Diane Mettler

Don Frickel chuckles when he talks about what inspired him to start up Don Frickel Cutting Inc.

"I logged with my Dad since I was 15. When your dad owns the business, you get out before the rest of the crew, get everything fired up, and stay late. On those November days, when it was raining and blowing, I'd look up and the cutters would be drinking coffee and then go home. And when they did cut, they had a six-hour day. I couldn't believe it! So I said, 'Someday I'm going to be a cutter.' And when I got the opportunity, I did."

Logger Turned Cutter

It was 1984 when Don made the jump. At first, he was considered somewhat of the black sheep of the family, but over time that faded. He was soon cutting for his dad, and when his dad retired, Don continued cutting for Weyerhaeuser.

Today, he cuts primarily for Weyerhaeuser and Rainier. On average, he runs 12 hand cutters as well as a feller buncher. And on the day he was interviewed, his team was cutting for four tower jobs, three shovel jobs, and a right-of-way — a very full plate.

At summer's peak, when the company is doing a lot of right-of-way work for

Weyerhaeuser, Don has close to 20 hand cutters. "I'll cut probably 60 to 70 miles of right-of-way during the summer," he says, "and that takes quite a few guys."

Adding a Feller Buncher

The biggest change for Don, over the past 20+ years, has been incorporating a feller buncher. He always wanted to stay with a small, hand cutting team, but the industry evolved and he had to follow.

"I was always raised with the idea that you go to work to get out of debt, not go into debt so you can keep working," says Don. "But things have changed, and people want a feller buncher on the job. It can speed up

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production as much as 40 percent, so loggers insist on having a feller buncher where they can have one."

Don's first feller buncher was a Prentice and, in time, was replaced with a Timbco. "I really went dingy and bought a second one — a used Timberjack," says Don. "Then I realized keeping two of them going was way more work than I wanted to do. So I got rid of them and bought a new John Deere."

The 949J

He didn't just get a John Deere, this February he purchased the 959J, the first of its kind sold in the Pacific Northwest. It's designed for high performance and comes with a unique leveling system, ideal for steep slopes, as well as 294 maximum horsepower.

"I had decided on another machine, then I talked to John Deere," says Don. "I never wanted to be the first guy on the block to buy a new machine, and I told John Deere that I didn't want to be the guinea pig. But what really swayed me was the sales and service on it."

Don needn't have worried. Don has the feller operating six to seven days a week and is happy with the results. The only issue he experienced was handled



Frickel averages 12 handcutters, but employs as many as 20 during summer months.

swiftly and efficiently by Pape' Machinery in Tacoma, Wash. "They were just tremendous," says Don. "You'd thought I'd dropped a body off at Harborview [a local trauma center.] They just did cartwheels to make it right for me."

Capable Crew

Don knows that his company is as good as his crew. His feller buncher operator, Dale Stokin, has 10 years of experience running feller bunchers and has been part of Don's crew for more

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than three years. "He takes care of everything," says Don. "I pretty much find the job, get him lined up on it, and I can just forget about the job until it's time to go to another one. It really makes it nice."

Don has others who have been with him a long time, like right-hand-man Denny Hanshen, who's been working for Frickel for 21 years. But there are new additions, like his son Kelly.

Don admits there's a lot of turn over, in part, because it's hard work. "We had a gal come out and do physicals on the men. She didn't think anyone at the office would believe our chest expansion. But when you're working hard and breathing hard all the time, you start building up bigger lungs," he says.

Safety Takes Center Stage

Besides changes in machinery and regulations over the years, Don has seen an intense focus on safety, especially by Weyerhaeuser, which he whole-heartedly endorses. "Safety is the number one issue in this industry. It's just such a dangerous job, you've got to instill in the team that safety comes before anything — even production."

Don Stokin, feller-buncher operator with Don Frickel standing alongside.

Considering the number of men Don employs, and the number of hours they work, he has very few incidents. But a near fatal accident really woke his crew up to the importance of safety.

"You hear about accidents — somebody in Oregon got killed, or Kelso — but you don't know them," he says. "When it happens in your crew, to one of your friends that you've worked with for years, and someone you know is a really good cutter, you realize it can happen to anyone, at any time, if you're not paying attention."

If not for cell phones, Don's cutter wouldn't be alive today. A helicopter arrived as Don's crew was stabilizing the injured man on a stretcher. "The paramedic on board put a stethoscope to his chest and said, "I don't care how stable he is on a stretcher, get him to the



landing immediately," recalls Don. "We got him up there, and the paramedic ripped his shirt open, stuck a knife in between his ribs, and inserted a hose to drain the blood. He'd punctured one of his lungs and was drowning."

No crew wants to learn the importance of safety through a close call like that. That's why Don endorses Weyerhaeuser's policy that every accident is preventable. "In theory, it is. If you are doing everything you're supposed to do, and you're doing it correctly, it is preventable. That's our goal — to have everybody going home every night. There's probably not a night that my crew doesn't talk about some sort of safety issue on the way home."

A safe crew also is good for the bottom line in a world of escalating insurance costs. "Like car insurance, if you have a lot of accidents your rates go up, and if don't, your rates go down. But even the lowest rates are high. I probably pay \$8.00+/hour, per man out there."

Some might be overwhelmed with the changes involving safety, regulations, and machinery, but not Don. He's optimistic because his motto is a simple one — do a quality job and the work will follow.

"I owe a lot of my success to my dad," says Don. "He taught me to be honest, always pay your bills, and treat your crew fair. And if you treat your crew fair, they'll stay with you."

That was almost 30 years ago. If Don's son takes an interest in running the business, Frickel Cutting could be in the business for decades to come.