

Rental Product Focus: Electric-Powered Log Splitters

Written by Linda Beattie

People burn wood for many reasons; some like to have a small cozy fire burning in the fireplace of their den, some use cured wood to heat their homes for the winter, and some people – like me and my family, enjoy camp fires and roasting marshmallows. As I sit in my rocking chair out by the camp fire writing this article, the end of summer nears and my thoughts turn to the more comfortable weather of fall and how much better this camp fire is going to feel when it isn't 85 degrees out. If Labor Day is the unofficial end of summer, then fall has unofficially begun and that means the rush is on to split wood for the upcoming winter months. More and more people are turning to wood burning to reduce their home heating costs - and with good reason. With gasoline prices averaging 2.74, natural gas at 13.04 (\$/per million cubic square feet), and heating oil at 2.50 per gallon, there is no doubt that home heating costs are going to be staggering this winter. Additionally, each of these energy sources are scheduled for price increases in 2008, pushing heating prices up during the harshest months of winter. The EIA (Energy Information Administration) reports that 2008 natural gas prices (the most common method of home heating in the US) will be up 4.7% over 2007.

Price Summary – August 2007

	Year				Percent Change		
	2005	2006	2007	2008	05-06	06-07	07-08
WTI Crude^a (\$/barrel)	56.49	66.02	67.61	71.25	16.9	2.4	5.4
Gasoline^b (\$/gal)	2.27	2.58	2.74	2.81	13.5	6.4	2.3
Diesel^c (\$/gal)	2.41	2.71	2.82	2.99	12.5	3.9	6.2
Heating Oil^d (\$/gal)	2.05	2.36	2.50	2.68	15.2	5.8	7.3
Natural Gas^d (\$/mcf)	12.84	13.75	13.04	13.64	7.0	-5.2	4.7

^a West Texas Intermediate. ^b Average regular pump price.
^c On-highway retail. ^d Residential average.

Pricing Summary courtesy of the Energy Information Administration, Official Energy Statistics from the US Government.

To put some reality into the above statistics, many consumers are being forced to choose between heating their homes and other necessities...like food, medication, and cutting back on other utilities. Soaring costs are forcing consumers to look toward other economical methods of home heating. Whether necessity or nostalgia, wood burning is definitely back in style! Homes are featuring a resurgence of wood burning stoves and fireplaces. Whether people burn wood in a stove, fireplace or fire pit, all of these consolidated wood burners require split wood. Splitting wood with an axe, or wedge and mallet, is back breaking to say the very least. It's also time consuming and requires a great deal of upper body strength. Mechanical log splitters have long been the tool of the trade for efficient log splitting. Gasoline-powered log splitters have long held the top spot in this market and have become a rental product standard. However electric log splitters are now finding their niche as an attractive rental option. Through the physics of hydraulics, the electric log splitter is as powerful as a comparable gas-powered model of similar horsepower. These smaller, more portable, easy to use electric log splitters are becoming more commonplace in the suburbs and for urban residential use as ordinances against noise is more of a factor in these areas. For this growing group of customers, a compact, electric log splitter may just be the ideal product - and for the savvy rental store, an attractive rental opportunity.

There are two general types of electric log splitter; horizontal and vertical. Horizontal log splitters split wood laying down, either on a trailer or mounted to a table top. The log is placed on the unit and splits as pressure is applied from a plate on one end forces the log onto a wedge at the other, thus causing the "split". Vertical log splitters stand upright with the log placed in an upright position. The bottom plate moves the log up the shaft and against a wedge at the top of the splitter, which splits the log. Electric log splitters have many advantages over gasoline-powered models. Electric units are very quiet, energy efficient, easy to use and tend to weigh a good deal less than gas units of comparable horse power. Some vertical units utilize a dolly chassis design making them as easy to wheel around as a suit case for easy use indoors or out. Also, because these units stand upright, they take up less space in the store and they are easier to transport for the rental customer as well.



Some vertical units utilize a dolly chassis design making them as easy to wheel around as a suit case.

General Electric Log Splitter Rental Tips:

- Before you rent any piece of power equipment it's important that the entire staff review the Safety Features and Owner's Manual supplied by the manufacturer for each product.
- Inspect equipment before and after each rental. Keep all nuts, bolts and screws tight to be sure the equipment is in safe working condition and check hydraulic fluid levels before renting.
- Check safety stickers and decals - replace any that are worn before you rent the unit out.
- Take the time to show the customer personally how to operate the product and supply them with the Owner's Manual for reference.
- Inform the customer of the proper attire to wear when operating power equipment: close fitting clothing, long pants (never shorts), and proper foot wear (closed shoes with good grip - never open toed shoes or sandals), and gloves to reduce the risk of splinters from the wood.

Electric Log Splitter User Safety Tips:

- Don't allow children, those otherwise incapable, or people who are not familiar with the operating instructions to operate the log splitter.
- Dress properly. Do not wear loose clothing or jewelry that can be caught in moving parts. Long pants, non-slip gloves and sturdy work shoes with non-skid soles are recommended when working outdoors. Wear protective hair covering to contain long hair.
- Keep the work area clean and free from obstructions, i.e. loose logs, split wood, etc. Cluttered areas invite injuries.
- Work only in daylight or in good artificial light.
- Always inspect the unit before each use and ensure that handles, guards and fasteners are secure and in place. Be sure that all electrical cords are not damaged or broken.
- Never attempt to use an incomplete machine or one fitted with unauthorized modification. Any modifications to the machine can cause personal injuries.
- Check the log before splitting. It should be free from nails or wire that could be ejected during the splitting operation. This could cause personal injury or damage to the machine. Log ends should be cut as squarely as possible.
- Never attempt to split more than one log at a time, unless the ram is fully extended, and you need the second log to complete a split of the first log.
- Do not attempt to load the log while the ram of the log splitter is in motion.
- Keep your hands and body parts away from all moving parts and away from the open splits and cracks in the log. The wood can retract suddenly and cause injury.
- Do not try to defeat or override any safety features.
- Stay alert. Watch what you are doing. Use common sense. Do not operate machine when you are tired, ill, or under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication.
- Never leave the machine unattended when in use.
- Do not use machine in an area where natural gas, gasoline fumes or flammable liquids are present.
- Never open the switch boxes or motor cover.
- Never try to do any electrical repairs yourself. Contact a qualified electrician or the manufacturer for help and information.
- When log splitter is used outdoors, use only extension cords intended for outdoor use.
- Always place log splitter on firm, level ground and block the wheels.
- Always split wood along the grain. Do not attempt to split logs against the natural grain of the wood.



Some electric log splitters can be used indoors as well as outside.

With all of the conveniences of an electric log splitter, it is still a powerful tool and should be handled carefully. Log splitters are a high-ROI tool that will make your dealership money year after year with little investment on your part. General maintenance may include occasional sharpening of the wedge and an occasional check of the hydraulic fluid. It's important to take proper care of your little money maker as it will serve you and your customers well rental after rental.

END –

Photo's courtesy of Mantis®

Mantis is a registered trademark of Schiller Grounds Care, Inc.