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bigger tractor. I use it to operate a 5-ft. bush hog and to dig with the backhoe.

"The main shaft on my **Ford 1210 16 hp**, 4-WD tractor broke so I replaced it with a stronger shaft. The job required a big teardown. I use a 4-ft. bush hog with this tractor and adapted a 3-pt. mounted backhoe to it. The backhoe was originally designed for a Bolens tractor. I made a 3-pt. hitch for the backhoe and it worked great."

T.A. Sampson, Cane Hill, Ark.: He's impressed with his 2012 **Massimo 500** utility vehicle (www.massimomotor.com). "I previously owned a Polaris Sportsman and had a good operators manual for it that allowed me to make most of my own repairs.



However, I almost had to disassemble the machine to access anything on it. Also, the electrical circuitry was a nightmare. Then I found this beauty. The Massimo is simplicity personified. Everything on it is accessible, there are no circuit boards, and it runs like a dream. It's comfortable, easy on fuel, and has a bed that dumps. This utility vehicle greatly exceeded my expectations.

"I found the machine at a local dealer, but had never heard of the brand before so I researched it online before I bought it. Upon delivery I discovered the reason for the great price: Assembly required. The unit came in its own special metal crate, and it was obvious that unpacking it would require serious thought and planning to keep from damaging both the vehicle and myself.

"It took me the better part of an afternoon, much of that time spent unpacking just to get down to the main body of the unit. Then in a cavity under the driver's seat I found a cardboard box with assorted small parts and, you guessed it, a DVD on how to unpack everything. There also was a DVD covering assembly, and it appeared pretty simple but it didn't turn out that way.

"I enlisted the help of a friend to assemble the unit and it took us exactly 8 hrs. and most of the hand tools I own. This process actually turned out to be a plus, because now I know exactly how everything fits together and works."



J.R. Holt, Cincinnati, Ohio: "Pocket-sized jump starters are really neat. They're only 6 by 3 in. in size, yet carry enough charge to start an ATV, car or tractor multiple times.

"I hooked an LED headlamp up to one with the jumper cables, and it was so bright I couldn't stand to look directly at it. It ran for 2 1/2 hours before it started to dim. I recharged the battery in a few hours.

"There are a bunch of different kinds on the internet and in stores. I saw one for \$130 in an ATV magazine and then found the same one on the internet for \$100. I bought another one for \$53 on Amazon. I took them both apart,

and the lithium ion batteries inside were the same size.

"You can get different sizes, but the standard has worked well for me. It packs a lot of amperage. I have 3 different brands. They come with all kinds of adapters.

"The amazing thing with these little batteries is they actually do what they say they will. You can get rid of your big battery jumper and keep one of these in your pocket."

John R. Marma, Braceville, Ill.: "I had 1,000 tons of wood chips delivered to my farm recently. They cover about 2 acres, 5 ft. deep. Not only are they free, but left to compost for a few years, they make a great soil amendment.



"Getting chips is no problem between the high speed rail they're putting through the area and a recent tornado that took down some trees.

"I thought about setting up some sprinklers over the chips to encourage breakdown, but we've had regular rain, so they're breaking down. I turn them so they'll compost faster.

"I have some chips that are 2 to 3 years old. I spread in the fall and chisel them in in the spring. They turn the ground a couple of shades darker."

Ray Yount, Kellogg, Idaho: "Recently I searched the internet looking for a broad axe handle - something I wasn't likely to find at my local hardware store. I ran across a company called **House Handle** that sells wood handles in varying grades for every tool you can think of (www.househandle.com; ph 800 260-6455).

"I decided to buy their top-listed grade, which I thought was reasonably priced. I got the handle in the mail and the craftsmanship was excellent. It came well wrapped along with 3 wedges. I paid \$11.10 for the handle and \$7.87 for S&H."

Leroy McLaughlin, Rogers, Ohio: "My worst buy is my 2013 **Poulan 16-in.** electric chainsaw. I was only able to cut 1 1/2 cords of wood before 3 of the teeth on a plastic gear broke off. The company doesn't offer a replacement gear, so the only solution is to buy a new motor. However, the motor costs almost as much as a new chainsaw. It was a nice saw when it worked, but now it just sits in my garage."

Stanley Montgomery, Dayton, Tenn.: "I spend about 400 hrs. mowing lawn every year so I've gone through several mowers. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to beat the quality of my 2014 **Bad Boy Outlaw** series zero-turn riding mower (www.badboymowers.com; ph 870 698-0090).

"As with most farms my yard isn't typically lawn quality and has some furrows and holes in it. I also do a lot of rough roadside mowing. My Bad Boy is designed just right for these conditions. It has a low center of gravity so it's not likely to roll over, and the transmission is well protected. It has good traction on steep hills, which can be a problem for other zero-turn mowers. The Kawasaki engine is super dependable."

David A. Crooks, Ottawa, Kan.: "My 2013 **Stihl MS290 Farm Boss** chainsaw is extremely reliable, starts easy, is well-balanced, and has a lot of power. It's equipped with an 18-in. bar, which is a real bear for a mid-size saw. I really like this saw's side chain tensioner."



Kevin Horner has many compliments for the rotor and concave setup on his Versatile RT490 combine. "It's an aggressive threshing system, yet easy on the grain," he says.

Simplicity Key To New Versatile Combine

"The new Versatile RT490 is the best combine I've ever used," says Kevin Horner, who farms with his wife Lori Byck near Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan. "We ordered the first 2 machines of this model that Versatile sold in Canada 3 years ago and they've done everything the company said they would. I was really impressed with their simple design, minimal electronics and easy maintenance. I really liked the idea of a feederhouse beater system rather than the chain system because it doesn't pull big clumps into the machine all at once like a chain system. Instead, it's more like a pre-thresher because each of the 4 drums rotates slightly faster than the previous one."

Horner also has many compliments for the machine's rotor and concave setup. "It's a very aggressive threshing system, yet very easy on the grain," Horner says. "There are 3 pinch points because the rotor turns one way and the concave rotates the opposite direction. The machine works more efficiently and produces cleaner grain with less cracking than any of the 5 previous machines we've owned. We harvested canola the first year in very hot weather and the seed was about 6 percent moisture, but we didn't see many splits at all. Neighbors had parked their machines and couldn't believe we were still running. We ran a loss test and it showed just under 2 percent, which was excellent. In wheat we've had an excellent sample, around 1/2 percent dockage. On other machines it might be 2 to 3 percent."

Horner really enjoys how easy the Versatile machines are to work on. "First of all, they don't have a lot of electronics,

which means that the machine won't be shut down because of a computer glitch. In terms of service, everything is right there in front of you when both side panels open up. We can grease them easily, check belts and clean away dust and chaff. We're using about 9 gals. of fuel an hour, so consumption is very low for a 490 hp engine."

Horner says another big plus of the RT490 is capacity, especially in tough conditions. Versatile reps have told him that the machine is almost impossible to plug because of its power, intake system and rotor design. The concave turns at a constant 7 rpm's in the opposite direction of the rotor. The rotor can operate in first gear at 250 to 500 rpm's and second gear at 500 to 1,000 rpm's. Speeds are infinitely adjustable in the cab. Slower speeds are for crops like peas and canola and higher speeds for wheat. Although the combine carries the Versatile name, it is built at a Rostselmash factory in Russia. A yield monitor, wheels, tires and a few other parts are installed when the new machines reach Canada.

Horner says, "The Versatile tech team has been very helpful in setting up the combines for each new season. They've been very proactive in calling me to set up a time for maintenance checks and to see how the machines are running during the season. We've run more than 5,000 acres through these machines without any mechanical problems. If you're in the market for a powerful Class 9 combine that does an exceptional job, I recommend this model."

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Watson Scott, Middlebury, Ct.: "I like my 2014 **Brute Force 18-24 HD** firewood processor (www.bruteforcecmfg.com; ph 715 245-2144). This machine is ideal for maximum wood production and has features that other, more expensive brands don't have. It's easy to use and can handle 20-in. dia. logs up to 16 ft. long."

The machine comes standard with a live deck that's raised and lowered hydraulically with a lever on the operator control panel. A

14-ft., hydraulic-operated stacking conveyor swings 3 ft. left or right to allow you to easily load firewood into a trailer or truck box. Joystick controls are used to operate the hydraulic saw, clamp, live deck, and log conveyor. It comes standard with a 4-way, hydraulically adjustable wedge.

Paul Welch, Black Creek, Wis.: "I've always been a Deere fan, but when I went to buy a utility tractor last February I bought a **Yanmar** instead because it cost about \$10,000 less. I use it with a front-end loader, 60-in. belly-mounted mower, and rototiller. Yanmar used to manufacture utility tractors for Deere."

Howard Keever, Columbus, Mont.: "My 2012 **Poulan Wild Thing** chainsaw is hard to start and underpowered. Also, I can't adjust the carburetor on it without a special tool. This saw never has run right."

Agustin Molina, Robstown, Texas: Agustin has had good luck with the wolfberry plants (also known as goji berries), he purchased from **Phoenix Tears Nursery** (www.phoenixtearsnursery.com; ph 435 753-