

Another hit for Hitman maker

The long-awaited Hitman PH330 processing head acoustic optimisation system, from Christchurch-based Fibre-gen Ltd, has moved a significant step forward with the completion of the first trials in a forest in Scotland.

The world-leading Hitman PH330 system allows a processing head to take acoustic soundings of a stem to test its stiffness prior to making a cut decision. The head then makes a log according to specifications entered into the software that manages the system, enabling a logging crew to precisely match logs to the requirements of a mill.

It's been five years in development, with the latter part of the trials completed in Scotland this year after additional funding was received from the UK.

"The initial trials have been successful and now we are working on a pre-production Beta version that will be tested on a machine here in New Zealand and another in the United States, before it is released to the market," says Nigel Sharplin, Sales and Marketing Director of Fibre-gen.

Final production versions of the Hitman PH303 are expected to be available to customers here in New Zealand by the end of this year.

Fibre-gen is perhaps best known for its Hitman HM200 handheld tool used by many logging crews in New Zealand and in overseas countries to record stiffness of stems in manual log making via acoustic measurements when the wood is struck with a hammer – a much larger, static version is sold to saw mills. Another tool, the Hitman ST300, uses probes to measure the stiffness of standing trees using similar acoustic readings after the trunk has been struck with a hammer.

Effectively, the PH330 takes the technology of the ST300 and inserts it into a harvesting head to automate log making decisions. A pair of probes is attached to the processing head – a Waratah Bigwood was used in the testing phase – and these are inserted into the stem ahead of the log making decision, starting with the butt and progressing towards the top of the felled tree. Prior to each cut, an acoustic signal is measured and if the variation (stiffness) is greater than the predicted log grade, it will drop back to a lower grade.

The aim of the PH330 is to extract more value from each log by knowing its quality, as well as measurements at the time of log making. The information is entered onto a barcode that stays with the log to identify it.

Current computerised optimisation systems used on processing heads only measure the taper of the stem and integrate this with the sweep and knot information fed into the system by the operator, to determine what grade of log to make.

Mr Sharplin says the ability of the PH330 to read the stiffness of a stem prior to making a cutting decision is the next step to complete optimisation and its application on a processing head is a world first.

The PH330 can be integrated into any current optimisation system, either on a new machine or existing one and can also be used on its own.

“It can undertake very good log making decisions without any other optimisation system, so it could be retro-fitted to just about any head,” adds Mr Sharplin.

However, he believes the PH330 will likely be integrated into the optimisation systems used with new processing heads and he says Fibre-gen is aiming to form strategic partnerships with head manufacturers to get this process under way.

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