



They came, they sawed, they conquered

Susan Burke reports from the UK Loggers UK Championship 2019, held at Newton Rigg College in Penrith.

Above: The clock stops for Richard Elliott (right) as he slams the base of his saw down on the end of the cleared pole. On the leaderboard, Welshman Gethin Hughes had been running neck and neck with Richard until this final discipline.

THE UK Loggers mid-August competition at Newton Rigg College, Penrith was characterised by an undercurrent of anticipatory excitement. Richard Elliott, who has distinguished himself in UK Logging Competitions since they were initiated in 1995, explained: "It's the first time we've run a two-stage competition for the selection of the team who will represent the UK at the 2020 World Logging Championship in Serbia. The top six people from today's competition will go through to a second competition, to be held at the Confor Woodland Show. The top three people from that competition will form the UK team, together with the top junior from the under 24 years of age class. The change has added a bit more edge and sharpened people."

August 17th at Newton Rigg saw 18 competitors, two of whom were juniors, vie for position in the disciplines of tree felling, fitting another chain, bucking by combined cuts and precision bucking. Richard Elliott first demonstrated his remarkable chainsaw skills in competition over 30 years ago at the Devonshire County Show. Nevertheless, his ambitious personal and professional achievement standards, combined with an exacting and carefully planned training programme, have ensured that the

Dan Williams moved into chainsaw training from commercial forestry and won the top novice title at the Royal Welsh Show – before picking up the same award with the UK Loggers at Newton Rigg.

woodsman from Bovey Tracey is still at the top of his game. Wielding a Husqvarna 572XP, at the end of the day he was just maintaining a lead over the up-coming young Welshman, Gethin Hughes. Gethin, as is usual when he competes, favoured the Dolmar brand.

Tension mounted on the morning of August 18th as the pair prepared to go head-to-head in the limbing discipline. A World Gold Medal holder for this demanding event, Richard succeeded in proving his prowess once again. In fact, described as "the man with more chainsaw awards than anyone else", the talented and dedicated Devonian added yet another trophy to his already impressive collection when he won the Newton Rigg competition.

Gethin Hughes too has shown himself to be a highly motivated, committed and gritty competitor. Currently he is honing his already superior chainsaw skills on the precipitous slopes of Cumbria's Thirlmere Reservoir.

"Working for Dewi Williams, I'm tackling wind-blow caused by the Beast from the East a year or so ago.

There are some whopping trees and the ground is so steep that we cling on with a knee and a foot most days. If you start slipping, you use your teeth. We don't want it too easy or it





Above: The full team at the UK Loggers August event at Newton Rigg College, Penrith.

Left: Judge Neil McKay measures the angles left on the freshly cut surface.

Below: Dan Barry, a harvesting contracts manager for Tilhill, completes the tree-felling discipline. The accuracy of the directional felling cuts is assessed by the beam of a laser impinging upon a board. Other cuts are later measured manually for precision and points deducted for faults.



wouldn't be forestry."

The competition was rounded off by the newly introduced relay challenge. A fast-paced but precise discipline, the relay race is an exhilarating team competition in which the contestants must cut a wooden disc from a specially set-up standing or lying tree in the shortest possible time. Apart from noting the time factor, the referees give particular attention to compliance with safety regulations. The relay race discipline is scored as a team competition and is not calculated for ranking with the remaining five disciplines.

Although the UK Loggers are largely funded by showcasing their skills at events such as county shows, they also benefit from sponsorship offered by a range of companies. The long-established Swedish marque Husqvarna is foremost amongst these - providing prizes and also training opportunities for Husqvarna chainsaw users entering the biennial World Logging Championships.

Andy Campbell - who has spent the majority of his working life in the forest - is chairperson of the UK Loggers. He has competed in European Logging Championships since they began in 2009. Andy is also a Husqvarna Ambassador. He explained: "In 2016 I was



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invited to become a UK ambassador for forestry because of my dedication to the brand and to competitive chainsaw use. To be an ambassador is to be the connection between the manufacturer and the end-user."

Dave Keith had travelled to Newton Rigg College from Wicklow in the Republic of Ireland. "It's my first competition and as far as I know I'm the first competitor from southern Ireland. I'm very much enjoying the event; everybody is helpful and friendly. It's a serious competition though. I decided to have a go because we in southern Ireland, with the help of Husqvarna, would like to field our own team in competition. My competing at Newton Rigg has started the ball rolling. I've also spoken with Tony Brady who is director of Liffey Distributors Ltd (exclusive distributors of Husqvarna in Ireland). He is very keen so hopefully we can move things forward."

Dave reported that on the forestry side approximately 25 motor-manual operatives are sawing in southern Ireland but that only 10 make a full-time job of it. When he left Aberdeen and went over as a climber in 1986 it was for a three-week contract, but Dave never returned to Scotland. Driven largely by the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom in the 1990s, southern Ireland's arborist industry is, he said, "not only flourishing; its standards have also come on by leaps and bounds."

Richard Elliott wasn't the only Devonian present at Newton Rigg. Bob Woodhead

explained that, encouraged by Richard Elliott, he had started competing in 1996. The former tree surgeon last took part about five years ago before retiring due mainly to ill-health. Bob honed his chainsaw skills felling big timber. In the 1970s he was in among the West Country's elms. His crew also worked from Sussex to Cornwall cutting big butts for furniture production. A few tumbles over the years have earned Bob the nickname 'Bionic', but he insists that he wouldn't change his past career for the world.

Bob, who acted as head judge at the recent Newton Rigg competition, told me: "This weekend is the first time I've done the job and it's a very different experience. But I've been helped along the way by others who've done it before. There's been some serious competition; the standard of felling at the top end has been above average. Of course, the UK Loggers would love to see more people coming forward. The secret to success lies with practice, practice and more practice!"

Top left: Dave Keith precision bucking. From two logs, the object is to cut off a disc of between 30 and 80 mm thickness.

Above left: Dave Keith puts in his last cut in the new 'relay' event.

Above: Andy Campbell is one of three UK-based Husqvarna ambassadors.

Left: Back in the day, the long-limbed and agile Devonshire-based tree surgeon, Bob Woodhouse, was a formidable adversary in the UK Loggers timbersports events.



Above: Before the disc hits the ground, Peter Fox has engaged the chain-brake and can lift his foot and set off for the second log.

Below: Alun Jones (right) has been a stalwart supporter of the UK Loggers and also of the Forestry Contracting Association.



Forestry Commission woodland officer, Peter Fox, entered his first UK Loggers competition in 2004. A top-notch professional with a preference for Stihl chainsaws, he has since represented the UK in the World Logging Championships on three occasions. Drawing the Newton Rigg event to a conclusion, he remarked: "Our one-day events are paying off. People are upping their game and thereby gaining confidence. What a weekend it's been; so electrically charged and tense because of the new system."

Peter also congratulated best newcomer Dan Williams on his score of 1,348 points. The chainsaw instructor from Hartpury College, Gloucestershire explained that he has previously won best newcomer at the Royal Welsh Show. "I've come up to Penrith with Mark Edwards who has been competing with the UK Loggers for quite some time, so I'm in with the big boys now."

It looks as if Gethin Jones, who took first place in the under-24 class, is shaping up to be 'a chip off the old block'. The son of the highly experienced and successful UK Logger Alun Jones, he has been attending competitive events since boyhood.

Peter Fox offered thanks to everyone involved in organising the event and to its sponsors. FISA contributed hi-vis work shirts as prizes. Tilhill Forestry provided timber for the poles, which were turned by Clifford Jones. Contractor Alun Jones also supplied timber. The judges were: Bethan Stephens, Bill King, Tony Savage, Bob Woodhead, Richard Siddons and Andy Whitworth - not forgetting Robert and Josh. Mike Caughlin was scrutineer. Michelle Campbell was scoring officer.