

Blue Ox Loader

What is a Missouri sawyer doing in Louisiana loading refrigerators instead of trees and how does the Blue Ox loader fit in?

BY DAVID BOYT

Nine weeks after Hurricane Katrina, the cleanup was well underway. Beginning over a hundred miles inland, there were a few trees down, and blue tarps on some of the roofs. Moving south toward New Orleans, there was more evidence of damage. The roads were clear, though there was still a great deal of cleanup and salvage work to do. The west part of New Orleans had been spared the worst of the hurricane, but moving east in the city on I-10, the damage was much worse. On side streets in the residential areas, it was clear that it would be a long time before there would be a return to anything close to normal. Water lines on the buildings showed that the flooding here had been about 3-feet deep. Refrigerators, stoves, furniture, and storm debris lined the streets as residents cleaned out their homes in preparation for rebuilding. Cleanup crews were moving street by street, removing the trash. Somewhere out here were Cecil Williams, his crew and a Blue Ox loader. Turning onto Crete Street, I found the crew loading a truck. In a little while, Cecil pulled up, his Blue Ox knuckle



Cecil Williams stands next to his Blue Ox loader.

boom loader and trailer in tow behind a white 1-ton Chevy Diesel pickup truck with “Disaster Relief” on the side.

Cecil Williams, Katrina, and the Blue Ox

Cecil owns a sawmill that specializes in walnut in Moberly, Missouri. “My dad was in the sawmill business, and my uncles were in the sawmill business. I was rollin’ logs when I was nine years old. I started my own mill in 1962, after I got out of the Air Force, and I’ve been in it ever since,” he told me. “This is my first adventure in following storms,” he explained. “I never did think of it as a business. I’m getting to the point

where I’d like to be able to semiretire. If there’s a storm, I’ll work it. That’s why I bought this Blue Ox. I can take two or three trucks, this ox, and a teleloader and make an income from that.”

Williams has a lot to manage on this job. “We have two flag people, a teleloader operator, a skid-steer operator, and six trucks running,” he told me. Among the crew are his wife, who works as a flagman, and his son, who drives one of the trucks. He summed up the magnitude of the cleanup this way: “In 20 minutes, my son counted 81 trucks going into the dump. It’s hard to imagine if you haven’t seen it yourself. They’ve just got mountains of

debris there.” Doing a little math, that’s a truckload of trash and debris about every 14 seconds! Cecil was kind enough to visit with me and discuss his Blue Ox loader, though the interview was interrupted at least a dozen times by everything from problems with flat tires, to positioning his crew and equipment.

When he decided to bring a crew to the Gulf Coast to assist in the cleanup, he knew he would need some additional equipment. “I discovered the Blue Ox loader at the wood show in St. Charles, Missouri.” There were several features that caught his attention. “I had never seen a knuckleboom loader mounted on a gooseneck trailer.” This would allow him to maneuver the loader into tight places. The trailer measures in at 48 cubic yards. “The cost of running a trailer is less than half that of a truck because of the license and insurance. The ox trailer has a dump on it, and that attracted me,” he continued. The dump bed makes for a quick turnaround at the dump.

The one on display was sold, but Cecil ordered another one on the spot, which he picked up in Pennsylvania. “I already knew I was going to come down here, and thought it would work great picking up brush and debris.” He did not plan on using it to pick up refrigerators. “I really didn’t know what to expect. So far, it’s worked out pretty well. I’ve been using it for residue from houses and brush. One person can do pretty well with it. It works out well for us.”

The Blue Ox is powered by an 18-hp V-twin Honda engine. According to Williams, “It’s really a sweet little engine. Runs great, does an excellent job.” The loader itself can lift 4,122 pounds at 5.5 feet out, and 1,200 pounds fully extended. If necessary, the operator can drag a heavy object to it, and then use the full capacity to lift it onto the trailer. Cecil got the extend-a-boom option. This is a hydraulically telescoping boom that adds an extra 3 feet, 8

inches for a total reach of 22 feet, 8 inches. The loader pivots 375 degrees, which allows Cecil to load other vehicles.

“When we started out here, that’s all we had to load with,” he told me. The 50-inch bypass grapple opens wide enough for anything he needs to pick up, and allows him to pivot the load without winding up the hydraulic lines.

A Quick Demo

Although he had made the last load for the day, Cecil was kind enough to give a quick demonstration of the loader. “We’re required to pull out by dark,” he explained. The Honda engine came to life at the touch of the starter button. Cecil lowered the downrigger stabilizers, and then climbed up to the controls. In a moment, he had seized a refrigerator, swung it around and set it down in the trailer as easily as if it had been a cardboard box. Williams praises



Many of the streets in residential areas still had trash and debris nine months after the hurricane. Although the cleanup continues, it will be some time before it is cleared out.

the smooth action of the hydraulics and the light touch required by the controls.

When I asked how long he planned to stay in New Orleans, he replied, “We’ve still got the demolition to do. There are thousands and thousands of houses that will have to be torn down. I plan to stay down here until it’s done. It’ll be at least a year.” Cecil talked about some of the modifications he plans to make to some of his equipment to make it more effective. What about the Ox? He said that he might cut down the sides a bit lower so it would clear



Loading a refrigerator. Williams has found the Blue Ox versatile in removing everything from brush to refrigerators.

the low electric lines, but other than that, he'd keep it the way it is. Finally, I asked him about his sawmill back in Missouri. "I've got a general manager and it's still running," he replied as he raised the downriggers and shut down the engine.

Blue Ox Specs

To get a few more details about the machine, I contacted the Blue Ox headquarters in Vermont. According to factory representative Laurel Fortin, Cecil got the "Big Ox" model. This unit is mounted on an 18-foot-6-inch-by-8-foot-wide trailer with dual wheels and tandem axles on a heavy I-beam frame. It has a gross vehicle weight of 20,000 pounds, and a tongue weight of 1,600 pounds. With the standard electric brakes, it is DOT compliant. In addition to the optional 10-ton scissor-lift dump bed, Blue Ox also offers a 12,000-pound mile-marker hydraulic winch, self-level-

ing forklift, 7-foot steel ramp, and heavy-duty toolbox. Hitch options are gooseneck, 5th wheel, or pintle. Trailer side options are 8-foot or 10-foot sides, or log stakes. The loader is available separately from the trailer and can be mounted on a truck or trailer, if desired.

Blue Ox also has a smaller model,

"The cost of running a trailer is less than half that of a truck because of the license and insurance."

the "Lil' Ox." It uses the same equipment as the "Big Ox," but has a smaller (14 feet by 7 feet) bed and single wheels on each of the tandem axles instead of dual wheels. It has a gross vehicle weight of 14,000 pounds.

A number of Blue Ox loaders have been shipped to buyers in the Gulf Coast area for salvage work. Other buyers include loggers, lumberyards, landscapers, and tree services. "Tree service is a big market,"

Fortin told me. "The loader eliminates the need to wait and pay for a log truck to move the logs." Firewood processing is another use for the machine. "They can use the dump box to drop off a load of firewood, and then use the loader to pick up wood to take to the processing area."

Hurricane Katrina left devastation that will take years to repair. People like Cecil Williams, their crews, and their equipment have an incredible amount of work ahead of them. I doff my logger's hard hat to them, and wish the best to everyone working to rebuild their lives after the many recent natural disasters.

For more information about the Blue Ox loaders, call 802/467-1055, or check their website at www.blueoxequipment.com/. ■

Based in Neosho, Missouri, David Boyt is a frequent contributing writer to Sawmill & Woodlot magazine.

If You've enjoyed reading the **Blue Ox Trailer Review**, You'll Want to Subscribe to

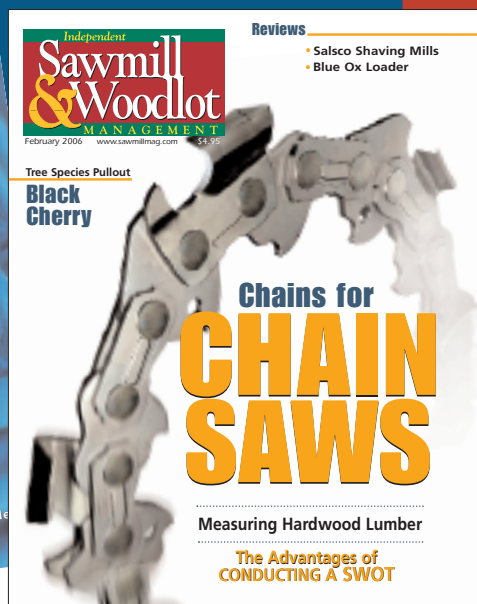
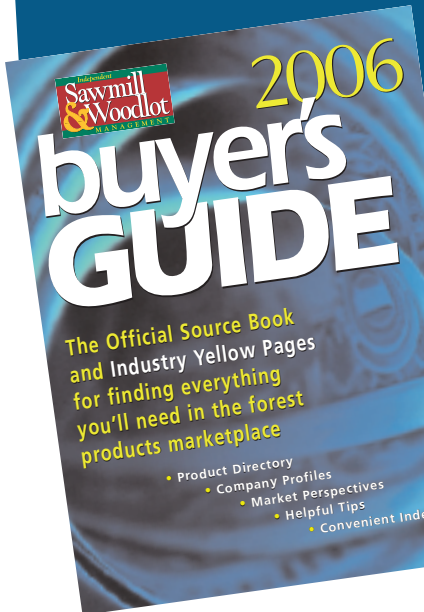
Sawmill & Woodlot magazine, "The Source" for:

- Sawmill & Equipment **REVIEWS**
- Sawing & Drying **Tips & Techniques**
- Managing Your Woodlands
- **Increasing Profits** in Your Business
- **BONUS** Tree Species Pullout
- And **MUCH MORE!**

ALL FOR ONLY

\$19.95

Use Code # IRVB06 to take Advantage of this Special Subscription Offer!



Call Toll Free 888/762-8476
Or visit www.sawmillmag.com