

The converted preaching

David Rossney reviews the Husqvarna 550XP Mark 11

Let me say at the start that I have been an XP user for a long time. In fact, from time to time, I still use my classic 254 purchased in late 1988, and made to commemorate 1989, the 300th anniversary of the Husqvarna company foundation.

As an instructor and forester, a roughly 50cc .325" Husqvarna has usually been the go-to saw for me for coppicing chestnut and early thinning in softwood stands. Over the years, I have seriously rated both the 242XP and 346XP. When the 550XP superseded the 346, I confess I thought putting 'chips' in saws would mean just more to go wrong, but I have to say I have been most pleasantly surprised by the generally reliable performance from my 550XP (2013). It still feels light but responsive, handles sweetly and seems to punch way above its weight, as useful in early stage oak thinning as in softwoods.

It is true that the 550 is much happier if allowed to use tank after tank of fuel, and dislikes a stop-start routine, but restarting (especially in summer) issues aside, I have had no real complaints over the last five years.

The question I'm inclined to ask is can Husqvarna improve on near perfection?

First impressions

Well it's both familiar yet different.

- **Differences in outward appearance.** A cleaner look and an extra sighting line to level the bar. It reminds me of the cross hair in a rifle scope.
- **A bit bigger looking.** The body is about 1 cm longer and 5mm taller, the latter perhaps to accommodate the redesigned and taller air filter?
- **Feels a little heavier?** On closer investigation I find the Mark 11 saw is now between 0.4 to 0.5kg heavier. (XP 5.3kg and XPG 5.5kg without cutting equipment)
- **A more robust looking exhaust muffler,** which I hope, may not dent so easily as the one on my old 550. I had seen so many of the same shaped dents on everybody else's 550s, one day I actually double checked to make sure it was not the original shape from new!
- **Hang on, they've moved the decompressor.** Wait, there is no decompressor!

After all these years we return to a saw without this almost ubiquitous feature, but somehow with no apparent increase in the amount of energy required to start the saw? I would be most interested to know how that has been achieved.

The result is that along with the auto re-setting

Mark 11 set up for sharpening in the wood
>>



PRODUCT REVIEW

>> stop switch the warmed saw is just one easy pull to restart, and so far, every time. Joy!

Taking off the covers

- In general, the Mark 11 seems easier to clean and maintain and may therefore be more likely to get done regularly by the busy contractor?
- I am pleased to see a redesigned area beneath the starter cover. The electric wires are now helpfully tucked away below the fly wheel in their own plastic lined groove in the casing, which makes for easier access when routinely cleaning the flywheel and eliminates the historic risk of the wires fouling the flywheel if the flimsy plastic cover gets cracked.
- The air filter looks radically redesigned, apparently higher capacity and better sealed, and seems to stay clean for a long time. It is fed with air through a re-designed air injection channel from the fly wheel.
- A redesigned top cover now has an extra thick wall to insulate the air filter/carburettor chamber from the heat of the engine.

Using the Mark 11

So far, the saw always starts easily from cold using the air purge/fuel primer and choke, but has a different, curiously low revving rate on both choke start and tick over, apparently the result of the re-designed air filter, air injection and new version auto tune. More reliable and with less wasted fuel on tick over, perhaps?

I found the new model a little more responsive than my old 550 XP. It runs and cuts really smoothly and without hesitation and all within a couple of seconds of starting, so definitely takes a little less time to get going from cold.

As expected it handles really well, and both felling and snedding are made very comfortable by the balance and the care in the design of the body shape which we have come to expect. Personally I favour a reduced gauge 15" bar and chain (1.3 mm) making the saw feel even more 'centred' in the hand.

Husqvarna claim that the cooling performance has improved by 13% on the old model, apparently achieved by improving air flow, increasing engine cooling fins and the better heat shielding of the carburettor from the engine mentioned above. I bet we



Mark 11 (left) starter and fly wheel layout - better organised and easier to clean than Mark 1 (right)

all know contractors who seem to regularly seize their saws, so perhaps this new emphasis on the 'endurance' properties will be very welcome?

Also, if these changes mean fewer unhappy minutes trying in vain to restart a warm saw, particularly in the summer, it will be a much needed improvement and would make many feel that Husqvarna have been really listening to their customers!

I am looking forward to testing this out on the Mark 11 this summer.

In a nutshell

It's hard to believe they could have improved on a saw I had come to regard as state of the art, but the new version 550 XP definitely feels like an upgrade. 10% heavier, but also feeling more powerful and robust while very smooth and balanced.

So thanks yet again guys.

They say it's important to enjoy your work... Well, this 550 XP Mark 11 now makes my working day go very nicely indeed!



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Fuelwood (Warwick) Ltd
www.fuelwood.co.uk
t: 01926 484673