

EQUIPMENT AT WORK



Great Dane pup on tracks

If you think that you've seen an excavator hanging around Brisbane creeks lately that looks a bit like a Great Dane pup (all head and paws), then you probably have, especially if it has 'Caldme' on its collar.



CALDME is Tamborine-based contractor specialising in long reach excavators, and the "Great Dane" excavator – all tracks and boom – is a machine you'll see nowhere else in Australia: a Cat 315D excavator with an amphibious undercarriage and long reach boom [there are other amphibious excavators but not of this size].

Its lurking around the creeks is not vagrancy: it is assisting the Brisbane City Council to restore flood-damaged and silted up creeks to their original function. The Caldme machine has had its boom and undercarriage built by a specialist Asian aftermarket manufacturer, but it is fully engineered and considerably more expensive than an off the shelf machine.

This is no accident: Caldme founder Andy Haggarty is confident enough in his knowledge of specialist applications to have input into most machines in his fleet, which is modest in size but impressive in its sophistication.

It says volumes for how the Caldme business progresses that Andy is already working on specifications for a second amphibious excavator: determining what he would modify on the existing design to achieve greater flotation, extra reach, greater climbing ability and improved transportability [the current machine travels at 4m wide, which means it is already easily transportable].

It's not that there's anything wrong with the current machine: it's extremely impressive to watch as it climbs up and down steep mud embankments and works from the middle of the creek to deepen the channel and shape the embankment.

It's just that Andy is the epitome of the "good, better, best" motto that was cast into the ends of the Furphy water carts used in early construction.

An amphibious excavator has a lot to offer the market, albeit that it is a small and specialised sector of the market. In being able to work in the water, an amphibious excavator requires little or no vegetation to be cleared so that it can access creek banks. It can enter the water in a cleared area and "paddle" to where the work is required.

With the size of its pontoon tracks, it has a very light footprint, in fact the operator leaves a greater impression walking through mud to climb onboard. The long reach is also important both in accessing areas with the bucket without having to get the machine too close and in being able to deposit spoil where it can be reached for removal.

Another application is placing rock armour to protect sensitive slopes, but no doubt other applications will be discovered where an amphibious excavator can do it better, or with less disturbance than traditional equipment. Bring on Mark II! □