



Precision in the Park

Out in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia, where the nearest dealer can be hours away from the job site, machine durability and ease of maintenance are key for keeping downtime to a minimum.

CATERPILLAR® | 100 YEARS

Proform Civil

State: WA

Local dealer: WesTrac



Years in business: 12

Machines in fleet: 6

For Proform Civil owner Dale Weerts, Caterpillar® machinery purchased through local dealer WesTrac has provided the comfort, accuracy and reliability he needs to undertake road building, car park construction and bulk earthworks in WA.

Having set up his family business in 2013, and with the support of the dealer, Dale has built up a fleet of Caterpillar machinery that has allowed the business to take on challenging bulk earthworks to a tight schedule and with minimal disruption to a National Park site.

Earthmoving Equipment Magazine caught up with Dale after the recent completion of a major road build and car park project for the State Government, to learn more about Proform Civil and how Caterpillar's machinery design and cutting-edge technology has helped him grow his business.

From design to digging

"I started out doing civil design work," Dale said.

"I worked with local governments and ended up working with Rio Tinto for a bit as well, doing a lot of design work on roads, railways and culverts. It got to the point where, as I was sat there designing projects at my computer, I wondered how I would go about building it."

This, he says, led him to project management



Some of Proform's Cat machines at John Forrest National Park. Images: Dale Weerts

where he managed contractors for building projects and saw his passion grow for getting involved at the ground level.

"I always had some small machinery, like a Bobcat, to do yard work," Dale said.

"Then, when I moved to a five-acre block, there was a lot of hard ground that needed digging and I ended up buying a little five-tonne excavator. Even before it arrived I had people asking me to do jobs and I ended up doing our neighbour's asphalt driveway. So that's how the contracting side started out.

"When I first started Proform Civil it was largely consulting work, so I was designing roads and culverts, and a lot of the work was for shires out in the Wheatbelt. When I got this excavator, I ended up doing a lot of work for them as well. Before you know it, I had a team, and then a truck and a 15-tonne excavator, then a 25-tonne excavator. It just kept on growing.

"It wasn't easy to set up the business, but I just love it and that's what keeps driving me every day."

Proform Civil's ability to both cover the design and construction sets the business apart, with Dale saying that it allows him to make design suggestions for his clients.

"There's passion there to be shaping up pads and building things, seeing it come to life. I especially like the design and construction type work. We actually do a lot of that now because a lot of the clients that we did design work for loved it when they found out we can build it too," he said.

"We do a lot of council submissions because I used to work for a lot of the councils around here," he says.

"So, we submit building permits and try and make it a bit easier for our clients, especially homeowners doing house pads for example.

"Even for one of our latest projects, which was for the state government's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions [DBCA], we ended up doing a lot of the drainage design, and it really helped the project."

Precision and skill

Among its many projects, Proform Civil undertook the delivery of a \$1.1 million 730m-long access road to a new day use area in John Forrest National Park in the Perth Hills.

The business also built the West Ridge car park at the site, with the day use area now fully completed and open to the public.

Dale said that this was the largest bulk earthworks project that Proform Civil has undertaken to date, and one that presented various challenges for the team.

"The access road was straight through the bush, so involved clearing a corridor," he said.

"It's also very steep, it had a 25 per cent crossfall, and we had to lift this road up in some areas by four and a half metres. This was logistically a challenging project because, with it being a National Park, we had to be very careful



Proform's Cat 325 fitted with grade assist technology developed by Caterpillar in partnership with Trimble.



The access road was straight through the bush, so involved clearing a corridor with the Cat 325.

around how we cleared it and rehabilitated the areas scarred by the earthworks.

"When we finished it, we were commended on our quality of work. We saved a lot of trees in the process and ensured that we didn't damage the trees that were retained."

Dale said that his Caterpillar fleet, particularly a 25-tonne Cat® 325 fitted with grade assist technology developed by Caterpillar in partnership with Trimble, was essential in achieving the precision needed to quickly build the road with minimal impact on surrounding vegetation.

"Once we'd won the job, I knew that I wasn't going to be able to use a laser level or just rely on conventional techniques to build up the height differences we were dealing with, and I didn't want to be running out onto the ground doing checks all the time," he said.

"So, I decided on the biggest excavator I could afford with GPS, and that was the Cat 325, and I honestly couldn't have done it without it. I put about 1500 hours on the machine on that job and everywhere that bucket went, I could see exactly where on the screen that I needed to be.

"It definitely helped me with timeframes and reduced the surveying costs massively as very little had to be pegged out.

"For me, coming from the civil design background, I'm used to seeing cross sections and long sections on the screen. Now, I'm actually looking at it in the cab, but instead of my mouse, it's my bucket or other attachment that I can see in relation to it.

"It improves the workflow 10-fold. Where we used to have a lot of set out pegs, you'd have to get out and use the laser level, so you'd be in and out of your digger 10 times a day. Now, I can see it all on the screen, and it's hard to describe how much time that saves you. I can see exactly what level I've got to work to. The technology now is amazing – you can literally press a button and the digger will screed off a flat area for you automatically."

Caterpillar collection

Proform Civil currently has a fleet of six Caterpillar machines – two loaders, a roller, two excavators and the Posi-Track that kicked off Dale's love for the brand.

"I bought a 259 Posi-Track as I was getting sick of being bumped around in the machine I

had and Caterpillar is well known for building comfortable equipment," he said.

"It's a really reliable, robust machine that gets the job done, so we ordered a 15-tonne Cat 315GC excavator after that and I was blown away by how nice it was inside. The air con is great and they're quiet inside with no vibration. Compared to other brands, you feel a bit more refreshed after a day's work in a Cat machine.

"They also put a lot of thought into the design. For example, it's easy to access everything for your daily service. On the 15t excavator, you can access everything from the ground for your checks, you don't have to get up on top of the machine to do it."

Another significant benefit he adds is the breadth of information that Caterpillar provides through its apps such as VisionLink, which provides remote telemetric data for his machines no matter where they are located.

"Having access to everything on my phone is really handy," Dale said.

"I can book in servicing, see how the hours are on each machine and how productive each machine has been in a day. In a morning I can check to see how much fuel a machine has in it, so when we go out to a site we know whether we need to take fuel. Caterpillar also puts barcodes on their parts, which I can scan with my phone and order it then and there. All of this reduces my downtime on site."

Strength in service

A vital component is the ongoing aftersales support provided by WesTrac, which Dale said is one of the reasons why he keeps returning to the brand.

"If I've got an urgent issue, they'll come out that day and fix it, which is really good support," he said.

"I was recently on a job where the machine was getting moved out to the Wheatbelt the next day, and I bumped one of the GPS cables. I called WesTrac and they fixed a new cable and it was ready to go, easy as that.

"Another example of how good their service is was when I took my 15t excavator on a float out to Hyden to build a car park, and when I got there I realised a stone had gone through the back window and smashed it.

"So we were out in Hyden, in the middle of nowhere, yet three days later WesTrac had a new window for me at the post office next door to where I was working. I was amazed. All I had to do was give them a call and they sorted it out for me. They keep you moving."

Family values

For Dale and Proform Civil, a high level of customer service and going the extra mile for clients is core to the business, and his Cat machinery plays a significant role in allowing him to deliver fast and efficient work even in the depths of a National Park.

"We are a family business, we're very honest, and we communicate with our clients every step of the way," he said.

"We try to help our clients where we can, and honesty and hard work is why our clients keep coming back, we try and make it easy for them to work with us and get their job completed."

As for what will be the next Cat machine joining the fleet, it seems a grader won't be far off.

"We're definitely looking for more machinery as we take on new jobs," Dale said, "and if we continue getting into the larger bulk earthworks we'll be looking at bigger equipment too.

"I want jobs that present a challenge to me, because that's how you grow. I'm not too worried if, in 10 years' time, we've got five pieces of equipment or 50, as long as we're happy doing what we're doing, we're still enjoying it, and our clients are happy. That's good growth for me and my family." **IIEE**

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Dale Weerts and baby son Jayden, who already has a love for the Cat machines, love the Cat 325.