



Habitat of the Canadian Crow

The first thing you see upon entering the Canadian city of Edmonton is a blast, or gusher, from the past. Leduc #1 was the first drill major oil well strike in central Alberta back in 1947, flipping the city's chief export from agriculture to petroleum quicker than you can shout, "Oil!" Sixty years later, the oil boom is back in black and bringing home the back-bacon for hardworking Canadians who were smart enough to see beyond the relatively stagnant oil economy of the latter 1990s. One such smart guy is Warren Crow, who started Crow Enterprises, Ltd. in 1999, to carve access roads into the oil-rich forests of the Alberta Province. Hitachi has been his excavator of choice from the start.

DAWN OF THE ZED

"In Canada, we don't pronounce the letter 'z' as 'zee,' we say 'zed,'" explains Warren Crow while speaking of his

new Hitachi ZX270LC-3 or "Zed"-X 270-3, as they call it in these parts. "It's doing some repair work on this lease (land leased from farmers by the oil companies), and it's doing a fine job," continues Warren. And so is the operator who's separating the topsoil from the dirt in a downright graceful manner. Warren explains why. "We have to treat this land as if it were our own. Our customer is leasing this ground for the natural gas beneath it, and we need to keep the landowner happy. That's one reason I buy Hitachi 'hoes — loads of power and exacting control. I'll flag my dad down and have him come out and talk about this machine."

Warren's dad, Doug, has been operating equipment for the past 22 years, so he knows a thing or three about productive and reliable iron. "Over the years I've run many brands, and I prefer the orange ones," says Doug. "Better lift power, and the controls are

an extension of the operator. I mean the pilot sticks on this Zed-X270-3 are precise, and they're right there — if you strapped a razor to the bucket, you could shave a guy with it."

THE 2.5-YARD DASH

Back in the saddle, Doug Crow returns to gingerly sifting topsoil with his Dash-3's 2.5-yard bucket, and we return to Warren and his preference for Hitachi. "We have nine Hitachi units, including a pair of 270s and a 350 Zed-X Dash 3 — that's a beauty machine. So far so good with the new four-cylinder engines but, to be honest, we're still trying to figure out if we prefer them to the old sixes. The fuel economy is fantastic, and they're Tier-3 compliant — that makes the Environment Canada people happy, but we need more hours to give it a total thumbs-up. We've run our 2004 Hitachi 270 4,400 hours with no

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downtime, so I'm optimistic about this machine."

We bid Doug and Warren good day and head out to another Crow Enterprises project that's taking place some two-hours' drive away. The road between Devon and Drayton Valley is rough and populated by countless semis hauling derricks, heavy equipment, and even some oil-and-gas contraptions that, frankly, we could not identify.

SEISMIC MATTERS

Oil company geologists blaze through the forests laying down "seismic line." This line can accurately pinpoint dinosaur graveyards — oil and natural gas deposits far beneath the earth. Once these reserves are located, the drilling begins and a wellhead valve is installed. Then it's a matter of building roads that lead to the wellheads for the trucks that collect the goods. That's where Crow Enterprises comes in. They clear a path through the bush (Canadian for forest) and build a "teardrop" or "lease" — an oval-shaped elevated clay road built around the wellhead.

"I've seen them drill down 3,500 meters (11,843 feet) to pump oil,"

says site foreman Bob Kiehn. "Once tapped, they'll pump for decades or until they run dry. So we build roads and teardrops for new wells and take the roads out for reclamation work when the lease dries up. Each of these jobs requires a couple dozers and a 'hoe. These days Hitachi is becoming the excavator of choice in Canada — they absolutely dominate."

LONELY TEARDROPS

We transverse the roughed-out teardrop to talk to Richard Eyjulfson, the man who's running the Hitachi Zed-X to see how he likes Canada's favorite excavator. "Well, I'm used to running forestry machines, so an excavator's new to me. But it's very comfortable and has strong breakout forces — very powerful hydraulics."

We trudge through the sloppy Alberta clay back to Foreman Bob, who tells us Warren Crow is off in the bush looking at a future teardrop job. "Wherever it is," says Bob, "Warren will be sending me there, along with some big orange Zed-Xs."

Crow Enterprises, Ltd. is serviced by Wajax Industries, Edmonton.



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