

EXPLORING EQUIPMENT

Skid-Steer Loader Selection

Powerful and versatile, skid-steer loaders often operate under adverse conditions. These highly maneuverable machines work well in tight spaces. In sports field construction, where moving rocks, earth, and sod and other heavy objects is commonplace, skid-steer loaders can save the day.

Here are a few skid-steer loader basics, courtesy of the Melroe Company, manufacturers of the Bobcat loader line, to consider when you begin to search for the right machine:

Rated Operating Capacity. The rated operating capacity of a skid-steer loader is the equivalent of one-half a load that would cause the unit to tip forward (statically) at maximum reach. This capacity reflects a load that a machine can handle under normal operating conditions.

Performance. Skid-steer loader performance depends on a number of factors besides engine horsepower. Other vital variables include weight distribution, tread-width-to-wheelbase ratio, axle torque, breakout force, pushing force and engine torque.

The most accurate measure of engine power is net horsepower. However, it's crucial for the machine to transfer that power to the wheels as efficiently as possible. That's where the other variables enter the equation.

For example, an engine that develops high net torque at low rpm has better lugging capacity, which is needed for digging and pushing. To provide a more accurate method of analyzing actual loader power, always cite horsepower at specific rpm. Axle torque is a direct measure of torque available at the axles. Axle torque must be adequate so that the loader can put its power to work at the wheels.

A measure of applied power in digging or excavating application is called breakout force — the prying force exhibited by the bucket. Another variable, pushing force, is a function of machine weight and traction.

The weight distribution and tread-width-to-wheelbase ratio should allow for easy turning or skidding under load, eliminating the need for excessive horsepower. Such "balanced" design also increases the life of tires and the drive train.

Serviceability. Loaders that provide easy access to regularly maintained components help keep productivity high. For example, tip-up operator cabs and swing-out tailgates greatly enhance serviceability of hydrostatic and engine components. The easier it is to perform routine service, the most likely it is to be performed on schedule.

Attachment Capability. Since versatility is the hallmark of skid-steer loaders, attachment capability is a vital consideration when purchasing one. Not only should the loader be able to accept a variety of implements, but attaching and removing them should be quick and easy, without the loss of strength and security.

These are but a few of many considerations to keep in mind when buying or leasing a skid-steer loader. Others to contemplate are dealer selection and the manufacturer's service and parts network. Also, consider depreciation and resale value — slow depreciation and high resale value are often the marks of a high-quality piece of equipment. □

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